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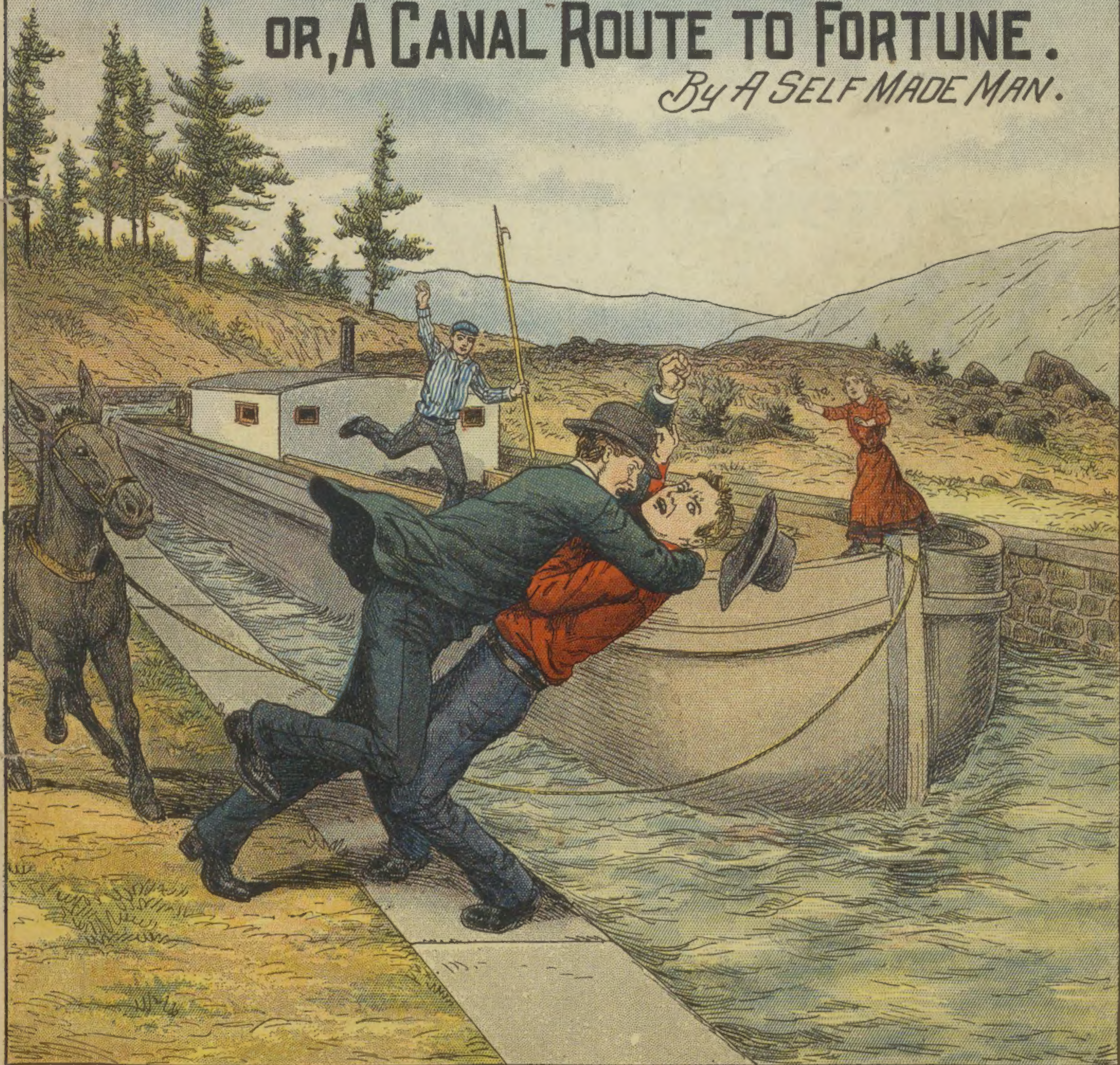
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FAME ^{AND} FORTUNE WEEKLY

STORIES OF
BOYS • WHO • MAKE • MONEY.

JACK JASPER'S VENTURE; OR, A CANAL ROUTE TO FORTUNE.

By A SELF MADE MAN.



"I'll fix you, you young viper!" hissed Dave Wambold, closing with Jack, and trying to force him into the canal. Millie uttered a shrill scream, which attracted her brother's notice. He grabbed a boathook and ran forward to Jack's assistance.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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JACK JASPER'S VENTURE

OR,

A CANAL ROUTE TO FORTUNE

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES JACK JASPER AND HIS FRIEND BEN BURLING.

"Missed again, Ben," laughed Jack Jasper, as the smoke from the muzzle of Ben Burling's shotgun floated away and the water-fowl he had shot at winged its low flight across the Camden marshes.

"By gum! I don't know what's the matter with this old gun. It seems to be goin' back on me," replied Ben, in a vexed tone.

"It isn't the fault of the gun. You looked crooked, that's all," chuckled Jack.

"How could I look crooked? No, it's the blamed gun, I tell you. I never missed twice in succession before in the whole course of my life."

Ben looked critically at his weapon, but he couldn't find out where the fault, if any, lay; nevertheless, nothing could convince him that his failure to hit the water-fowl was due to any want of skill on his part.

Jack Jasper and Ben Burling were both residents of Camden, a small town which was situated on the north border of the marsh that extended for some distance around the neighborhood.

Jack was about eighteen, and lived with his widowed mother and a sister in a small cottage on the suburbs of the town, and close to the water course of an old disused canal filled by water diverted from the Salmon River.

This canal circled around the edge of the marsh and skirted a part of the town.

Once on a time canal boats came down the Salmon River from Centerport, a flourishing manufacturing town, en-

tered the canal at Camden, passed through the artificial waterway, and dumped freight and even passengers at Jordan, a town on the west shore of Lake Cadillac, whence they were taken across in a small steamer to Eastlake, on the opposite shore.

But the building of a railroad which took in Centerport knocked the business of the canal boat company into a cocked hat.

East-bound freight and passengers were carried a much longer way around, it is true, but the iron road made quicker time, though the cost of carriage was higher than the old canal boat rates.

As time is money in a majority of cases, shippers naturally preferred the railroad to the slow-going water route, so the canal transportation company went out of business and abandoned their boats and the canal itself to the ravages of time and neglect.

Ben Burling was a young man of twenty-five years of age, and a particular friend of Jasper's.

He had a sister named Millie, who was an uncommonly smart girl.

Jack and Ben had been employed until lately in a small furniture factory, Ben as engineer and Jack as fireman; but the closing down of the works on account of the failure of the company threw them out of work.

With plenty of time on their hands, they had gone shooting on the Camden marsh, a favorite amusement of theirs, on the day we introduce them to our readers, and had already bagged a fair supply of game.

"I guess it's time we started for home," said Jack, taking a look at the sun, which was low down in the sky.

"I reckon you're right, Jack. We don't want to be caught on the marsh in the dark, and we've got quite a way to go before we can reach the bridge that crosses the canal."

"We've done pretty well," said Jack, glancing into his stuffed game bag. "I've got fodder enough here to fill our larder. We won't need to call on the butcher for several days, and that's quite an item, considering I'm out of a job."

"You're better off than I am, anyway," replied Ben, "for your mother owns her cottage, while I have rent to pay."

"That's right; but the rent you pay won't break you or make the landlord rich."

"Well, six dollars a month is something. If I didn't have it around the first of the month old Grimes would have a face on him as long as a yardstick."

"I shouldn't think that six dollars would worry him much. They say he's very well off. I heard that he holds mortgages on a dozen buildings in Camden, and on one or two outlying farms besides."

"It wouldn't make any difference if he owned the whole of Camden, he'd be just as graspin' as he is now."

"Funny that an old man like him should be reaching out after the dollars, when he's got more now than he can possibly spend if he lived to be a hundred."

"Spend! Why, he doesn't spend anythin'. He just hoards it up. A cent looks bigger to him than a dollar does to you and me, poor as we are."

"I know he's got the reputation of being a miser; but people always exaggerate such stories. I don't believe he's worth half what folks imagine he is. They say he lost a lot of money in the canal company when it went up. That canal was a pet hobby of his, and it broke his heart when the railroad put it out of business. They say he hasn't been exactly right in the head since the failure of the company he helped to finance."

"Don't you worry about his head," said Ben. "I wish I had as shrewd a head on my shoulders. I'll bet I'd soon be worth money."

"What good is money to a person if he doesn't enjoy it? What's the use of piling up gold for somebody else, maybe a distant relative, or even a stranger, to blow in?"

"No good. I always get as good a time as possible out of my little money. A fellow is a long time dead. Sis won't need it, for she's bound to get some chap to look after her. I consider her a prize package for any likely young man."

"I guess she is. She's a fine little housekeeper."

"None better. She can make a dollar go as far as any woman, and further than most."

While talking together the young sportsmen were picking their way at a good pace across the marsh.

This wouldn't have been an easy matter for one not so well acquainted with the place as they were; but both had the topography of the marsh down fine, having visited it a hundred times or more, and there was little fear of them walking into any treacherous spot.

They could now see the trees that lined the deserted canal in places, and the rising ground beyond.

They could also see an ancient mill, which lifted its gaunt and hoary remains on the edge of the marsh near

the bridge which they had to cross to reach the road to Camden.

No one in the county could remember when this mill was in operation, nor was there any record of the date when it was erected.

There was a tradition that the miller had hanged himself to one of the rafters, and on the strength of that legend the old place was said to be haunted.

Whether it was or not few people had the opportunity to find out anything on the subject, though it is true that two or three farmers, passing that way late at night, asserted that they had seen a ghostly kind of light in one of the windows.

As on each of these occasions the farmers were known to have gone home boozy from a tavern on the outskirts of Camden, and might reasonably be supposed to have been in that condition when they passed along the road opposite the old mill, their stories met with little credence.

It was quite possible they might have seen the flash of a match as some tramp who had sought shelter in the mill lighted his pipe, but as for ghostly lights at the mill or anywhere else, the community did not take any stock in them.

The sun disappeared entirely as Jack and Ben got within a hundred feet of the mill.

They took to the dried bed of a stream that had at some ancient date flowed that way from the Salmon River and lost itself in the marsh.

It was this stream which had furnished power to the mill, and no doubt the drying up of it had put the mill out of business.

No one living in that locality, and there were some old inhabitants, could recollect when that waterway was not just as it looked now.

Now that they were out of the marsh and near the bridge, Jack and Ben didn't care how soon it got dark, for they were not much over a mile from town.

"Come, step out, Jack. I'm feelin' as hungry as a hunter, and I'm thinkin' I can't get outside a brace of these birds, cooked as only Millie can cook them, any too soon," said Ben.

Unfortunately in stepping out Jack's weight came on a round stone, which slipped aside, and his ankle turned under him.

Down he went with a cry of pain, and, what was worse, he couldn't get up.

"What's the matter, Jack?" asked the surprised Ben.

"The matter is I've sprained my ankle badly, and I can't get on. I'll never be able to walk home. You'll have to carry me to the canal, so that I can bathe it, or it will swell to the size of an elephant's foot inside of half an hour. I know what I'm up against. Prompt attention and cold water is everything at the start of an accident of this kind. If I can keep the swelling down I'll soon get over it, but if I can't I'll be laid up for a week or two," said Jack.

"How in thunder did you do it?"

"Stepped on a stone that seemed lying there with malicious intent to do me up. Come now, help me up, and support me along. I'll have to hop on one foot."

With a great deal of difficulty Jack was assisted as far as the bank of the canal, and then he had a terrible job

trying to get his gum boot off, for the ankle was already badly swollen.

He suffered great pain while Ben, as gently as he could, pulled the boot off.

Removing his stocking, he plunged his foot into the cold water of the canal.

It sent a shock through his body like contact with a powerful galvanic battery, and he had to grit his teeth to avoid uttering a howl.

"Does it hurt?" asked Ben, noticing the expression of his companion's face.

"Hurt! Oh, no, it doesn't hurt at all. It feels lovely," replied Jack in a sarcastic tone. "I wish you were enjoying the same sensation, for misery always likes company."

"Thanks," chuckled Ben, "I'd rather the pleasure were yours."

"Gracious! the water is cold. It puts my teeth on edge."

"You don't expect to find the water warm at this time of the year, do you?"

"Of course not. It ought to cure my sprain in short order. It's about as painful though as having one's leg amputated."

"How do you know that? You never had a leg cut off."

"I just said that to give you an idea of my sensations at this moment."

It was rather heroic treatment that Jack forced himself to undergo, for the water was icy cold, and for a time it made the pain in his foot almost unbearable; but Jack was grit clear through, and as the swelling went down the pain decreased.

His foot was so chilled, however, that there was no apparent feeling in it.

He bound his ankle up with a wet bandage made out of his handkerchief, held in place by Ben's handkerchief.

Over this he drew on his stocking and then shoved his leg into his boot.

"It won't do for me to rest my weight on that ankle," he said to Ben. "You must help me as far as the mill and then go and borrow a cart of Farmer Bradley and take me home. By favoring my ankle all I can for a day or so I'll be all right. Had we been somewhere out of reach of water I'd have been in a bad pickle."

Ben assisted Jack into the ground floor of the old mill, where Jasper seated himself on a box which stood under the stairs leading to the second story.

"I'll leave my gun and bag of game here with you," said Ben, "and I'll get back with some kind of a vehicle as soon as I can."

"Yes, don't take any more time than you can help, for I'm anxious to get home and doctor my ankle with liniment," replied Jack.

Ben assured him that he would hurry, and then hastened away, leaving Jack to the silence and solitude of the ancient mill.

CHAPTER II.

DESCRIBES WHAT JACK HEARD IN THE OLD MILL.

Twilight was now on the face of the landscape, and the shadows of the ground floor of the old mill, which daylight had banished to the corners, began creeping forth like wild animals from their lairs in the jungle.

It was a lonesome spot at the best, particularly after dark.

The almost stagnant water of the canal made no sound, and at that season of the year there were few nocturnal sounds from nature's large family of winged and creeping things.

Only a very light wind blew across the country, not strong enough to even whisper among the loose boards of the mill.

As the chill gradually left Jack's foot the pain came back; but it was not so very bad, and he didn't mind it particularly.

He leaned his back against the wall, extended his game foot at full length, and kept his eyes on the darkening doorway.

The shadows settled down thicker and thicker about the room, and Jack's thoughts recurred to the yarns he had heard about the mill being haunted.

He didn't put any faith in them, nor in the idea of the materialism of the spirits of dead people, but he wondered if the miller who had originally ran the mill had really committed suicide by hanging himself to a rafter in the building.

"If I was at all nervous I wouldn't like to be obliged to remain in this old rookery after dark," he thought. "Thank goodness I'm not affected that way, for they say a person's imagination can go a long way toward making spooks out of nothing at all."

At that moment the silence of the mill was suddenly broken by the sound of slow and heavy footfalls somewhere down under the flooring.

"What's that?" cried Jack, becoming alert all at once. "There is somebody in this mill—down in the cellar where the wreck of the disused machinery lies crumbling away. Who can it be? Some tramp probably who has been snoozing there and has just woke up."

The footsteps sounded as if ascending a stairs now, and they came nearer every moment.

Presently he could hear them in a room beyond an open doorway.

Jack fastened his eyes on the door which he could barely make out as a blot on the side wall.

From the darkness surrounding the doorway a human form came forth.

It looked little better than a solid kind of shadow in the gloom of the big room where the boy sat.

It was a man of ordinary stature, and he walked straight for the outer door, where he paused and looked out for some minutes.

Then he stepped back and struck a match to light a pipe Jack saw between his teeth.

The flare of the match showed a smoothly shaven face and bushy eyebrows.

It also disclosed the fact that the man was commonly dressed.

He did not look at all like a hobo, and Jack wondered what he was doing in the building.

The man stretched himself and yawned as if he had been indulging in a sleep in the depths below.

Then he proceeded to walk up and down the room, apparently ruminating, while the smoke curled about his head and lost itself in the air.

Every time he came to the outer door he would pause and look out, after which he resumed his stride.

Jack thought it prudent not to reveal himself in his present disabled condition, for the man might not be an honest one, and there was no saying what he might not be inclined to do to him.

The boy got the idea from his movements that he was expecting somebody.

At that moment Jasper caught the faint sound of footsteps on the bridge.

"I wonder if that's Ben, or is it the person this man seems to be waiting for? It's a little too soon for Ben to be back, I think."

All doubt on the matter was dissipated by the appearance of an average built man in the doorway, with a grip.

"That you, Wambold?" asked the man with the pipe, advancing to meet the newcomer.

"Of course it's me. Who else would come here at this hour, or any other time, for that matter?" was the reply.

"Did you bring my grub?"

"Of course I did. Do you s'pose I'd forget you?"

"I should hope not, for there's nothin' left below but a package of crackers, and that wouldn't go far on a hungry man's stomach."

"Been working all day, I s'pose?" said Wambold.

"Up to about two. Then I lay down and took a sleep. Only waked up about ten minutes ago."

"How is the second plate getting on?"

"It's nearly finished."

"Well, it's time we looked around for the necessary coin to buy the press and other things we need for turning out a first-class imitation of the new treasury \$20 note."

"Where are we goin' to get the stuff?"

"Take it from somebody who has a superabundance of the article."

"Rob him, you mean?"

"That's what the world calls it," chuckled Wambold.

"That's risky."

"So is this business we're engaged in; but the promised results of our enterprise largely overbalance the risk involved."

"Yes, as far as the plates go they will be a perfect facsimile of the ones the Government uses to turn out the new notes. I'll guarantee that. If the paper and printing are equally good we ought to get rich on the rapid plan."

"You needn't worry about the paper, Spangler. The Government is doing that now over the unexplained disappearance of a case of it. The case will get here in due time. All that bothers me now is the press and other etceteras, but I think I've hit on a way to get the money to buy them."

"What's the way? Let's hear it."

"There's an old chap named Adam Grimes who lives with his niece in a small house on the outskirts of Camden. People say he's a miser and is so afraid of banks that he keeps all his money hidden somewhere on the premises."

"You can't always put stock in what people say," replied Spangler.

"I've investigated him, and find that, beyond a doubt, he's well off. He holds mortgages on many houses in Camden, and also on some of the farms around here. I've also

found out that he has a sister, who is bedridden, in Eastlake, on the other side of Lake Cadillac. He is in daily expectation of hearing of her death. He also has a brother living somewhere beyond Eastlake with whom he has been on the outs for years. The sister is worth money, and has made a will leaving it equally between the two brothers, though during her lifetime, for family reasons, she will hold no communication with either brother. Each brother is worried lest the other should hear of their sister's death first, arrive at her home ahead, and get away with some of the money before it can be regularly divided."

"Well, what has this to do with us?" asked Spangler, wondering why his associate should spring such a yarn on him.

"Don't interrupt me. Adam Grimes has tipped the gardener to let him know by telegraph the moment his sister is surely at death's door. The joke of the thing is that the other brother has also tipped the gardener to forward him the same information."

"How in thunder did you learn all this?"

"I found it out through the gardener, who was an old pal of mine once, and whom I can still depend on."

"Oh, that's what took you to Eastlake yesterday, is it?"

"You've guessed it. I arranged with Bilkins, that's the gardener, that when he received a telegraphic message from me containing the single word 'Grimes,' he was to go to the Western Union office and send a message to old Adam stating that his sister was at the point of death. Well, I sent that message this afternoon."

"Go on," said Spangler, much interested.

"As Adam Grimes has made an arrangement with the operator in the telegraph office at Camden to send him by special messenger without delay any message that comes for him from Eastlake, he has undoubtedly got the gardener's dispatch by this time, and has either started, or will soon start, for his sister's home."

"Well?" said Spangler.

"That will leave his cottage without any one but his niece, who is only a girl of seventeen, to protect his property. Now it is my purpose for you and me to visit the cottage about midnight, break in by the back way, which should be an easy job, chloroform the niece, and ransack the premises for the old man's ready money. If there are a few thousands on the premises, as I feel certain there are, we ought to get them, and then the problem of raising the funds we need will be solved. How does it strike you?"

"All right. You have a great head, Wambold."

"We'll have the whole night to make the search and may do the matter coolly and thoroughly. His cottage is out of the way, near the canal, and only about three-quarters of a mile from here. Nobody but an old curmudgeon and miser would live in such a place if he could afford better quarters. It's a wonder to me he hasn't been robbed long ago, for it's a cinch for any man with a little nerve and dexterity."

"I'm with you. Where and when shall I meet you to-night, for I know you don't care to hang around this mill for four or five hours?"

"You know the blasted oak tree on the mound about half-way between here and Camden?"

"Yes."

"Meet me there about eleven o'clock and I'll have the tools needed to break open the miser's strong box, if he has one, which I s'pose we may reckon on," said Wambold, taking a cigar from his vest pocket and a box of wind lucifers from another pocket.

Jack Jasper had easily overheard every word spoken by the men, and he had listened with eager attention to the plan afoot to rob Adam Grimes.

He determined to acquaint Ben with the facts, and get him to go to the police station in Camden and put the authorities on to the job, so that the two rascals, who were evidently counterfeitters as well, would be captured when they started to break into the old man's house.

Unfortunately for Jack's purpose the wind lucifer that Wambold used to light his cigar made a big flaring light, and as Spangler was standing facing the stairs, beneath which Jack sat, the rascal detected the boy's silent presence at once.

He uttered a startled exclamation.

"What's the matter?" asked Wambold.

"We've been overheard," cried Spangler, with an imprecation. "There is a spy yonder under the stairs."

"What!" roared Wambold. "A spy here, in this room?"

"Yes. Strike another glim so he won't get away," said his companion, rushing at Jack.

Jack knew that it was all up with him, for the two guns stood out of his reach and he was not in shape to either escape or offer any kind of an effective resistance.

"Hold on there," he ejaculated, fearing Spangler might step on his sore ankle. "I'm not going to run away."

At that moment Wambold flashed a second wind lucifer, and the two men saw Jack sitting on the box, and making no effort to move.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH JACK FINDS HIMSELF IN A FIX.

"Who in thunder are you, and what are you doing in this mill?" demanded Wambold, holding the match down so he could examine the boy's face.

"I belong in Camden, and I'm not here from choice," replied Jack, coolly.

"What's your name?"

"What do you want to know for?"

"Answer me, or it'll be worse for you," said Wambold in a threatening tone.

"Jack Jasper."

"What do you mean by saying you're not here from choice?"

"I was out shooting with a friend on the marsh this afternoon. On our way back past this mill I stepped on a stone and sprained my ankle badly. My friend left me here and went to get a cart to take me home. If I could have walked I wouldn't be here now."

Jack's story seemed plausible enough to Wambold, and the presence of the two shotguns and brace of bags filled with game proved that there was some truth in his statement.

"That's all right," returned Wambold, striking another match; "but why didn't you let on you were here when you first saw us?"

"I didn't know who you were, or what you might do to me seeing me here alone and unable to defend myself."

"You had the guns to defend you, didn't you?" said Wambold, rather surprised that the boy had not availed himself of them.

"I thought if I kept quiet I wouldn't need them. I didn't want to get into a shooting scrape."

"Now look here, answer me, you heard all we said—isn't that so?"

"Yes," admitted the boy.

Wambold and Spangler looked at each other, and it was clear they realized that they were in a bad box.

"You can't expect us to let you go away now that you have learned things that would compromise us," said Wambold. "Self-preservation compels us to take measures to prevent you from giving us away. Understand?"

"What are you going to do with me?"

"Remove you to the cellar, and keep you a prisoner there until to-morrow some time, by which time we will have made arrangements to quit this part of the country. It isn't safe for us to stay here now since you are on to us."

"I can't prevent you from acting as you choose. If my ankle wasn't out of order I'd put up an argument against your plan."

"It's lucky for us that you're a temporary cripple then," said Wambold, in a tone of some satisfaction. "It will make matters easier for us, and possibly for yourself. Which is your injured foot?"

"That one," replied Jack, pointing to the left one.

"Just hold him steady, Spangler, and I'll take his boot off and see how badly he's bunged up."

"Hold on, can't you take my word for it?" fearing Wambold might make matters worse for him.

"No, I can't," replied the man, shortly. "Seeing is believing in this case, at any rate."

"If you're going to take my boot off do it gently if you aren't a savage."

"I won't hurt you, though it would serve you right if I pulled it out of its socket. Seeing that you didn't come here on purpose to spy on us I'll let up on you."

Thus speaking he removed the boot without undue violence and then pulled off Jack's stocking.

He didn't deem it necessary to go any further, for the bandage was evidence that the boy had spoken the truth, so he pulled his stocking on again, and replaced the boot.

"You say your friend went for a wagon to carry you home?" he said.

"Yes."

"Then your friend will have to be disappointed. We haven't any time to lose, Spangler. Help this chap down in the cellar, tie him to one of the posts in an easy position, and put a handkerchief or cloth over his mouth for the present. It won't do to give him the liberty of yelling out until I have seen his friend and sent him away," said Wambold.

So Spangler helped Jack on his feet, and told him to step out, which the boy did, for he was not in a position to refuse the order, though he was sensible that his ankle was very much better, and would bear his weight to some extent.

In this way Jack was led down into the cellar and fixed according to Wambold's instructions.

In the meantime Wambold sauntered out of the mill and went across the bridge, where he stood awaiting the arrival of Ben Burling.

It wasn't many minutes before Ben came along with a horse and a light wagon.

He reined in near Wambold, tied the animal to a tree and started for the bridge.

"Hello!" said the rascal, in a friendly tone, "have you come after Jack Jasper?"

"Yes," said Ben, wondering who this man was, as he was a stranger to him. "Have you been in the mill and seen Jasper?"

"I have. Myself and a friend came along here awhile ago in a rig. We left a bundle in the mill when we went by this morning and stopped to take it up. We found your friend there sitting on a box. He told us he had sprained his ankle and couldn't walk. I offered to take him home, but he said you had gone to borrow a cart for that purpose. I told him he'd better go in my rig and that I would wait here and let you know that you had gone on. After some hesitation he consented. He's only been gone about ten minutes. He took the guns and game bags with him."

Wambold's story was so replete with facts that Ben believed him.

"All right," he replied. "It was very kind of you to put yourself out so much on my friend's account."

"Don't mention it, young man. It's only a mile to town and I don't mind the walk at all."

"I'll take this rig back then," said Ben. "It will save me the trouble of doing it later on. Good-night."

"Good-night," replied Wambold, starting off toward Camden, while Ben drove in the opposite direction.

As soon as Burling was out of sight, Wambold retraced his steps to the bridge, recrossed it and re-entered the mill.

Taking possession of the guns and game bags he went down into the cellar, where he found things as he expected.

In the boarded-off part of the cellar Spangler was seated at a table, on which was a candle, a plate, the open grip brought by Wambold and some other things.

Spangler had made a pot of coffee on a small oil stove and was eating his supper.

Jack Jasper was seated on the floor, with a gunny-sack under him, bound to a post and gagged.

Wambold removed the towel from his face.

"I met your friend, who had brought a light wagon for you, and told him you had gone home in my rig. He believed me and went off satisfied you were all right," chuckled the rascal, pleased at the satisfactory issue of his little maneuver.

Jack made no reply, but we are bound to say he was disgusted with the course of events.

"You must be hungry," said Wambold. "Spangler will let you have a couple of sandwiches and some coffee when he gets through. We don't intend to treat you any worse than we can help."

Jack said nothing, but he was hungry and did not object to the sandwiches and coffee subsequently offered to him, being released so he could eat them.

While he was getting away with the frugal spread Wambold and Spangler conversed in low tones at the end of the room.

After a time Spangler came over and retied Jack to the post.

It was now about eight o'clock and Wambold signified his intention of leaving the mill.

"Better gag our prisoner again so that he can't make any noise to attract the attention of his friend if that chap, finding that Jasper didn't get home after all, should come back to the mill looking for him," he said.

Spangler said he would attend to the matter, but intimated that he wouldn't leave the mill till half-past ten, anyway, and it wasn't likely Jasper's friend would come after that hour.

"You can't tell what time he may come, if he comes at all. In any case we can't afford to take chances. When you leave you will, of course, padlock the boy in here, so that even if he did get free from the post he couldn't get out of the cellar."

"Of course I'll do that. It's a good thing anyway that he's got a sprained ankle. That counts all the more in our favor," said Spangler.

"We can't have too much in our favor in this game. One bad or careless move might ruin us. It was unlucky for us that boy hurt his ankle so near the mill. Everything was progressing finely, and we couldn't ask for a more secure retreat than this. Now we'll have to find some other place temporarily until the hunt that will be made for us blows over. Then we'll come back, get the press and paper here and turn out enough treasury notes to make us both rich."

With those words Wambold left the cellar.

CHAPTER IV.

DESCRIBES HOW JACK MADE HIS ESCAPE.

After the departure of Wambold, Spangler busied himself packing up the two bank note plates and his tools in a box specially made to hold them, which had a handle so it could easily be carried like a grip.

What other packing he intended to do he deferred for another time.

Taking out and lighting his pipe he sat down at the table and looked at Jack.

"Do you often go shootin' on the marsh?" he inquired between puffs.

"I have gone during the shooting season whenever Ben and I could get off," replied Jasper, "which wasn't so often during the past year, as we were kept pretty steadily to work at the factory. Now that the works are closed down we can go when we please, that's why we were on the marsh to-day."

"So you're not workin' now?"

"No."

"When do you expect to go to work again?"

"Couldn't say. There isn't so many jobs that I can fill flying around loose in Camden."

"If you were willin' to stand in with us, and keep our secret, I am sure Wambold would make it well worth your while," said Spangler, looking hard at the boy to see what effect the suggestion had on him.

"You mean you'd pay me if I agreed not to give you away?" said Jack.

"That's it. We'd pay you well. It would be to our interest to do so."

"Sorry to disappoint you, but you and Wambold haven't enough money to buy me. In fact, I'm not for sale at any price," replied Jack.

"You're a Sunday School chap, I suppose," sneered Spangler, rather vexed at the boy's refusal to accept a bribe.

"Yes, I go to Sunday School. I suppose you never did."

"I did when I was quite young, but it never done me any good."

"No, I shouldn't imagine that it did," replied Jack in a dry tone.

"I know lots of Sunday School boys who have landed in jail."

"That isn't the fault of the Sunday School. A great many more have landed in jail who never went to Sunday School."

"So you won't listen to my offer?"

"Not on your life," replied Jack, firmly.

"You wouldn't need to work if you stood in with us, and you'd make more money than you've ever seen before in your life."

"You can't catch me with such bait as that."

"You don't know what you're missin'," persisted Spangler.

"Yes, I do. I'm missing a fine chance of spending a big part of my life in the State prison."

"I see there is no use arguin' with you," said Spangler in a vexed tone.

"Not the slightest."

"Some people don't know a good thing when they see it," growled the engraver, refilling his pipe and lighting it at the candle.

Jack did not answer him for two reasons.

First, he did not care to continue such a purposeless conversation, and, secondly, he became aware that the rope which held him to the post had become loosened in some way, and he felt that it would not be a hard matter to release himself.

Spangler continued to smoke and ruminate until the small, cheap clock in the place pointed to quarter past ten.

Then he got up and put on his hat.

"I'm goin' away and I can't tell when I'll get back," he said, addressing Jack. "As a matter of extra precaution I shall lock you in here, and I shall be compelled to tie a piece of cloth around your mouth to prevent you from shoutin' in case you should hear any one walkin' around above your head. You see we can't afford to take any chances seein' you are against us."

"All right," replied Jack. "Do as you choose; I can't stop you."

He spoke cheerfully, for he was sure that if Spangler did not inspect his bonds and correct their looseness he would not remain long gagged and bound after the rascal had taken his departure.

Spangler did not bother about the rope which held the boy, taking it for granted that it was secure.

He tied a small piece of cloth around Jack's mouth, not too tight, and after putting out the candle, which left the

cellar in the dark, he opened the door, walked out and adjusted the stout padlock on the other side.

Jack heard him making his way up the stairs, and then heard his footsteps crossing the floor above, after complete silence ensued.

"He's gone," muttered the boy. "Now to make a break for freedom if the thing is possible for me to accomplish."

Inside of five minutes he had removed his hands from the rope and the gag from before his mouth.

Two coils of the rope still held him loosely around the waist.

His jack-knife soon made short work of them and he got on his feet to find that his injured ankle felt comparatively all right.

"That cold water treatment did wonders for me," he thought, "and several hours' rest has greatly helped it. It feels almost as good as ever, but I must not be too gay with it or I may spoil the cure."

He walked to the table and lighted the candle with one of the matches he was accustomed to carry in his pocket.

Then he looked around the boxed-in room.

Spangler's grip, containing the counterfeit plates and his engraving tools, stood on the floor.

"If I can get away from here and hide that where the rascals couldn't find it—say at the bottom of the canal near the bridge—I'd be doing the Government a big service, and I might get a reward, too," thought Jack. "The problem, however, is to get out with the door padlocked."

Jack tried the door and saw that it was too strong for him to make any impression on it.

The partition itself was also strongly built and extended up to the ceiling.

Apparently wood taken from the upper part of the mill had been used in its construction.

Jack then turned his attention to other parts of the enclosure.

The stone blocks were as solid as the day they had been built, and were backed, of course, by the ground on all sides to nearly the level of the building.

It was clearly impossible to bore one's way through the sides in a limited space of time.

Looking at the ceiling in a casual way, Jack thought he saw the outlines of a trap-door in one corner.

A closer inspection showed that his eyesight was good.

He got the two boxes the men used for seats, put one on top of the other and mounting them tried the trap.

It was tight and immovable from long disuse.

Jack, however, was not discouraged by this circumstance.

He was reasonably sure it was not bolted on the other side, so he took a bit of joist that stood in the cellar and pounded lustily against it.

He was a strong boy, and shoveling coal into a furnace for months had made his arms muscular, so after a few minutes the trap yielded to his persistent efforts.

He threw it backward with a slam and saw the road to freedom before him.

The first thing he did was to throw the grip belonging to Spangler out on to the floor above.

The two shotguns and game bags followed, and then he pulled himself out and shut down the trap.

"That's doing pretty well for a fellow with a game leg,

though my ankle feels first-class considering. Now to hide the grip," he said.

He carried it outside, intending to drop it into the canal.

Seeing a thick clump of bushes not far away, he concluded that would be a better place for it, as he didn't believe the men would think of looking for it there when they missed it.

He hid Ben's gun and bag of game there, too, and then with his own limped across the bridge and started for home.

CHAPTER V.

WHEREIN JACK OFFERS TO DEFEND BESSIE BANNISTER AND HER UNCLE'S MONEY.

"It must be close on to eleven o'clock now," thought Jack, as he marched along with a limping gait. "Those two rascals arranged to meet at the scarred oak along this road at that hour and then go to Adam Grimes's cottage. I won't have time to go home and then notify the police before they will be in the house. If Grimes got that telegram and has started for Eastlake, the cottage will be wholly at the mercy of those rascals, for the old man's niece could hardly stand them off even if she discovered them breaking in, but the chances are she'll be asleep in bed when they get there, and she won't have any show at all. I think it's my duty to go there and help her frustrate their scheme. I don't see any other way just now of putting a spoke in their wheel."

The more Jack thought the matter over the more resolved he became to try and save the old man's property from the two counterfeiters.

As he drew near the scarred oak tree he became cautious, for he knew it would not do for the rascals to discover him.

However, he had both barrels of his shotgun loaded, and he determined to shoot at them rather than submit to recapture, much as he disliked the idea of shedding human blood even in self-defence.

A turn in the road brought the scarred oak in sight.

One man, evidently Spangler, was standing beside it smoking.

Wambold appeared to be behindhand in keeping his appointment, which was quite satisfactory to Jack, for it would give him time to reach Grimes's cottage ahead of the men—a very advantageous point.

In order to escape Spangler's notice all Jack had to do was to take to the woods behind the oak tree and circle around to the road further on.

This plan he followed, soon leaving Spangler and the scarred oak behind.

In due time he reached the old man's cottage which stood a hundred feet back from the highway, without seeing anything of Wambold, whose approach from town he had been watching for.

As he placed his hand on the gate he made out a figure in the distance which he judged was Wambold, so in order to escape observation he let himself into the front garden and crouched down behind the fence, where he could observe the person as he passed.

It was Wambold, walking at a brisk rate, with a carpet bag in his hand.

As soon as he had gone on some distance, Jack walked up to the front door and began to pound upon it.

The noise he made echoed through the house and awoke Bessie Bannister, Adam Grimes's niece, who slept in a back room on the second floor.

She had been in bed more than two hours, and was the only occupant of the cottage, her uncle having got the decoy telegram and departed for Eastlake right after supper.

She was a plucky girl, and did not fear remaining by herself in the house, for the possibility of being disturbed by thieves that particular night had not entered her head.

Indeed, a burglary in Camden or its environs was such a rarity that few persons thought about the possibility of such a thing happening.

The neighborhood, therefore, would have been a cinch for a couple of expert professionals in the housebreaking line.

The girl wondered at such a peremptory summons at that hour of the night, and, fearing some accident had happened to her uncle, she hastily threw on a wrapper and went to one of the front windows, which she raised.

"Who's there?" she asked.

"I am, miss," replied Jack, stepping out from under the shelter of the porch. "Has Mr. Grimes gone to Eastlake?"

"Yes," she answered. "What do you want with him?"

"Nothing with him since he is away as I supposed. I want you to come to the door and I will tell you what brought me here."

"Who are you?"

"Jack Jasper. It is important that you come to the door, for there is a plot on foot to rob this house at midnight."

"Rob this house!" gasped Bessie, aghast.

"That's what I said, miss. I accidentally learned all about it, and as there isn't time for me to go on to town and notify the police, even if I didn't have a sprained ankle, I decided to come right here and help you stand the scoundrels off."

Bessie didn't know Jack, and she had some doubts as to the propriety, or even the prudence, of admitting a strange boy into the cottage at night where she was alone, so she hesitated about complying with his request, especially as she could not imagine who in that neighborhood was wicked enough to plan a robbery of her uncle's home.

"I don't think it would be the right thing for me to let you into the house at this hour when my uncle is away," she said, doubtfully.

"If you don't let me in, miss, I'll have to stand here with my gun and take my chances against them single-handed, for I am resolved that they shall not rob the cottage if I can help it," replied Jack in a tone that somehow inspired her with confidence.

"If what you have told me is true, you might be hurt down there," she said.

"That's a chance I'll have to take if you won't let me in," he answered.

"I have never heard my uncle speak about you."

"He doesn't know me personally. He only knows me as a friend of Ben Burling, who lives in one of his cottages."

"You are a friend of Mr. Burling's, then?"

"Yes. He and I are great friends. I was his fireman

at the engine-house of the Camden Furniture Manufactory until it shut down the other day. I live half a mile from here, close to town, with my mother and sister. I assure you that you need not be afraid to admit me to the house, and it will be greatly to your interest to do so."

There was an honest ring to Jack's voice that further reassured the maiden, and she finally decided to take the chances.

Before going downstairs, however, she took her uncle's revolver from his bureau drawer.

Drawing the bolts of the front door, and unlocking it, she stepped back, the revolver partially concealed by the folds of her wrapper.

As she stood there in the full reflection of the light of a lamp she had brought downstairs and placed on a small table in the hall, Jack thought he never had seen a lovelier girl.

Her features were of the clear-cut Grecian type; her form was symmetrical and graceful to a degree, while her golden hair was plaited in two coils that hung down her back below the line of her waist.

"The robbers will be here in a few minutes, miss," said Jack, not making a move to enter the cottage; "but if you still have any doubts as to the honesty of my purpose you can close the door, and I will remain out here and do my best to defend you and your uncle's property."

There was a frankness and honesty in Jasper's bearing, and a sincerity in his manly countenance which dissipated all her doubts, and she said, in a calm voice:

"Come in, Mr. Jasper; I feel that I can trust you."

Jack accordingly entered, and putting down his gun and game bag made the door fast again.

"The men intend to break in at the back of the house, so I had better go there. Will you tell me your name, miss?"

"Bessie Bannister."

"Thank you. I am pleased to make your acquaintance even in so informal a way as the present," he said, with a smile.

Jack was a good looking, manly boy, and the girl took an instant liking for him.

She no longer entertained any doubts as to the truthfulness of his statement about the projected robbery of the cottage, nor of the propriety of admitting him under the circumstances.

"Will you show me the way to the back, Miss Bannister?" he said, taking his gun.

"Follow me," and taking up the lamp she led the way to the kitchen, which was as neat as a trained housekeeper could make it.

"I will turn down the light and place the lamp on yonder shelf," said Jack. "I intend to give these rascals a surprise that they won't soon forget."

After carrying this part of the programme out, Jack said:

"You have a revolver, I see. Have you the nerve to use it in case of necessity?"

She smiled confidently.

"I am accustomed to handling it, and I am not afraid to use it if it was necessary for me to do," she said in a way that raised his admiration.

"I see that you're not a coward, Miss Bannister," he replied.

"I should hope not. My father was an officer in the army, and was killed with Custer at Little Big Horn, while my grandfather fought through the Rebellion with the 110th Illinois Regiment," she said, proudly.

"Miss Bannister, I take my hat off to you. I am proud to know the daughter of any hero who fell with Custer. I have read the story of that fierce one-sided fight, and my blood quickened in my veins and my soul thrilled as I tried to imagine the awful massacre of those men as they fought doggedly against overwhelming odds and fell to the last man."

Jack spoke with the fire of enthusiasm in his eye, and the girl saw in his admiring glance a newly-born respect for her that instinctively softened her heart toward him.

"While I remain here, Miss Bannister," continued Jack, "I wish you would go to one of the upper front windows and watch the road in the direction of the old mill. The two men were to meet at the scarred oak, midway between here and the mill, and then come here. I saw one of them at the tree waiting for his companion, who passed this house just before I aroused you, so we may look for them at any moment now."

"I will do as you bid, Mr. Jasper," said Bessie; "but I want to thank you now for so generously coming to my aid to-night. I fear but for you these rascals would have got into the house and have overpowered me before I had a hint of their intentions."

"Don't mention it, Miss Bannister. I regard it as a pleasure to be of service to you. As soon as we have frightened these fellows off I'll tell you how I came to find out their designs on this place," said Jack.

Bessie went upstairs, leaving her revolver on the kitchen table.

When she glanced down the road from a window in her uncle's room she saw two men coming toward the house, one of them carrying a carpet bag.

"These must be the thieves," she thought, watching them from behind the curtains. "How fortunate it is that I have a protector in the house! How good he is to run the risk of facing those two men to save me from a terrible experience and protect my uncle's property! How brave he is, and how handsome!"

Wambold and Spangler paused at the gate and looked at the house.

It was dark and silent.

Satisfied that the place was practically at their mercy, they opened the gate and entered the garden.

Bessie immediately rushed downstairs to the kitchen, where Jack stood, gun in hand, waiting for the burglars to show up.

"They have just entered the front yard," she said, in a low, excited tone.

"Here's your revolver. Stand back of me in the entry. The rascals will probably try to force an entrance through the window of this room, as it is easier to overcome than the door. The moment they get it open we must give them the surprise of their lives," said Jasper.

As he spoke both saw the two men come into view around the corner of the house.

They walked up to the kitchen window and peered inside.

Jack pushed Bessie back and kept out of range of the rascals' vision.

Then the young people awaited the next move of the thieves with a feeling of excited suspense.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH WAMBOLD AND SPANGLER MEET WITH AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE.

Wambold and his associate lost no time in beginning operations.

They selected the window, as Jack judged they would, and began work on it.

Their object was to reach and unloosen the catch which held the two sashes.

To accomplish this Wambold first fastened a rubber sucker to the pane and then ran a glazier's diamond over a square surface of the glass large enough, when removed, to enable him to run his arm through with ease.

Giving the glass a smart rap, it came away, and Wambold lowered it to the floor by means of a long string attached to the sucker.

Then he inserted his arm, turned the catch and pushed the lower sash up to its fullest extent.

"Get in," he said to Spangler, and his companion started to obey.

He threw one leg in, and was in the act of swinging around into the room when Jack discharged the contents of one of the barrels of his shotgun into the leg.

With a roar of surprise and pain Spangler fell into the room, and lay groaning on the floor.

Wambold, panic-stricken at the unexpected and warm reception they had received, started to run.

Jack rushed to the window and discharged his other barrel after him.

Some of the bird-shot wounded him in one leg, but as it was not enough to disable him, he only ran the faster and disappeared around the corner of the house.

Seizing the revolver from Bessie's hand Jack ran to the front door, opened it and caught sight of Wambold passing through the gate.

He discharged several shots after the fleeing rascal, without hitting him, however.

Jack then returned to the kitchen, where he found that Bessie had turned up the lamp and was looking at the disabled and groaning burglar.

"Got a lounge handy, Miss Bannister?" asked the boy.

"Yes, there is one in the sitting-room," she replied.

"Take the lamp in there and then come back."

Spangler, noting a familiar ring in the boy's voice, looked at him, and, with an ejaculation of surprise, recognized the lad he had supposed was securely housed behind a strong padlock in the cellar of the old mill.

"You!" he exclaimed, with something like an imprecation.

"Yes, it's me all right," replied Jack, as Bessie carried the light from the room. "I got tired of staying in the cellar after you went away, so I worked myself free of the rope and walked out."

If the pain of a score of small shot wounds in his thigh

and calf hadn't taken up the greater part of his attention, Spangler would have been puzzled to account for Jasper's escape.

He started to say something, but it was cut short by a severe twinge of pain which wrung a groan from him.

Bessie now came back.

"I'll take him by the back and shoulders, while you lift his legs, Miss Bannister, and we'll carry him to the lounge in the sitting-room," said Jack.

Between them they conveyed the unfortunate burglar to the front of the house and laid him on the lounge.

Jack returned to the kitchen and closed the window.

Then he called Bessie out of the sitting-room.

"I hate to leave you alone with that fellow, even though you have a revolver with which to protect yourself, but I feel that I ought to run over to Dr. Boyle's house and bring him here to relieve this rascal of his pain and the leaden pellets I put into his leg. It would be cruel to make the fellow suffer all night as he is doing now. The doctor has a telephone in his house, and will be able to communicate the particulars to the police and ask that a couple of officers be sent to this cottage to take charge of our prisoner in the name of the law. There is little danger that the man who escaped will return here again to-night. The last I saw of him he was cutting down the road at a two-forty gait."

"Go to the doctor by all means, Mr. Jasper. I will watch this man and the house as well," replied the plucky girl.

So Jack hurried to the doctor's home, about a third of a mile away, and aroused him.

"What's wanted?" asked Dr. Boyle, sticking his head out of a second-story window, and not pleased at being awakened at that hour of the night.

"You are, to attend a man shot in the leg with the greater part of a charge of bird-shot," replied the boy.

"I'll dress and come down," answered the physician.

"You've got a telephone, haven't you, doctor?"

"Yes."

"Could you let me in before you dress? I want to communicate with the police station, and it will save time to do it while you're getting ready."

"Did somebody try to murder this man you want me to attend?"

"No; he was shot while breaking into Adam Grimes's house a little while ago."

"Breaking into Grimes's house!" ejaculated the surprised physician. "Is it possible?"

He came right downstairs and admitting Jack led him into his office and pointed out the telephone.

As the doctor returned upstairs, Jack called up the central office and asked to be connected with the police station.

As soon as this was done, the boy briefly stated the facts to the man at the other end of the wire, and asked that two policemen drive out to Adam Grimes's house for the purpose of taking Spangler into custody.

By the time he had rung off the doctor was ready, and he and Jack started for the miser's cottage.

On the way the boy narrated all the facts to the physician.

Reaching the cottage, Dr. Boyle proceeded to examine Spangler's hurts, the girl withdrawing to the kitchen.

It took some time for the extraction of all the small shot, and by the time Spangler's wounds were dressed the policemen arrived, and he was removed to the Camden jail.

The doctor also took his departure, leaving Jack and Bessie alone.

Jasper then told the girl the whole story of his experiences from the moment he sprained his ankle at sundown near the mill to the time he made his escape from the cellar and started for her uncle's cottage, hoping to be in time to head off the burglarious plans of the two counterfeits.

He rehearsed the conversation he heard between the two men, as near as he could recollect, and Bessie was astonished at the bold scheme Wambold had originated to get her uncle away from his home.

"My uncle got a telegram about five o'clock from Eastlake, which said that his sister, my aunt, was not expected to live till morning, and told him to come on there at once," said Bessie. "He got ready at once to go. It was too late for him to ride across to Jordan and catch the steamer to Eastlake, so he took the ferry across the river to Lathrop, where he could connect with a train that will take him to Clifford Junction, from which point he can get a train to Eastlake."

"When he reaches his sister's home he will find that the dispatch was a fake one. I suppose the gardener will deny having sent it, otherwise he would have an awkward explanation to make. The object of the telegram was to get your uncle away from this cottage so that the two rascals would have a clear field for their operations. If I hadn't sprained my ankle, and been obliged to remain at the mill till Burling went for a rig of some kind to take me home, I'm afraid their plan would have succeeded."

"I'm afraid it would, too," replied Bessie. "My uncle, when he learns all the facts, will be very grateful to you for saving his property. As for myself, I hope you believe that I feel deeply indebted to you for the service you have rendered me, and I shall never forget it."

She gave Jack a look that made his heart go pit-a-pat, and he felt that he would willingly go through fire and water for her sake.

"You are welcome, Miss Bannister. If you will permit me the honor of your acquaintance I will consider myself amply repaid," he said, earnestly.

"I shall be glad to regard you hereafter as a friend, Mr. Jasper," said Bessie, blushing slightly under his ardent look. "And I am sure my uncle will also desire to know you better. People do not speak well about Mr. Grimes because he is somewhat eccentric in his ways; but I assure you he is none the worse for that. He is not the miser that he is represented to be, though it is true he may have given the people of this neighborhood that impression because his tastes do not lead him to squander his money foolishly like many people. Remember he is an old man, and has outlived the desire for pleasures that others like to indulge in. The fact that he is well off is no crime. It is simply an evidence that he has used his opportunities to the best advantage, and is prudent in looking after what he has made. It is really harder to save your money than it is to make it."

Bessie's defense of her uncle impressed Jack favorably, and he began to think better of Adam Grimes.

"Well, I guess I had better go home now, Miss Bannister, but before I go I will nail up the kitchen window for you if you will get me a piece of wood and a hammer and nails," said Jack.

Bessie got the articles in question, and Jack fixed the window as well as it was possible to do so under the circumstances.

Then he bade her good-morning, for it was now after two o'clock, and receiving an invitation to call on her when he felt disposed to do so, he took his gun and game bag and started for his mother's cottage.

CHAPTER VII.

WHICH SHOWS HOW JACK GOT HOME AT LAST.

That evening when the little clock in the Jasper cottage struck eight, Jack's mother and sister, who knew he had gone shooting on the marsh with Ben Burling, began to feel anxious over his long absence.

They feared something had happened to him, and worried accordingly.

Half an hour later Ben knocked at the door and was admitted.

"Where's Jack?" asked mother and sister in a breath.

"Where's Jack! Why, hasn't he got home?" said the surprised Ben.

"No."

"That's funny," replied the engineer. "According to my calculation he ought to have been home an hour ago."

Then Ben proceeded to tell them how Jack had sprained his ankle so badly near the old mill that he (Ben) had been obliged to go to a neighboring farmhouse and borrow a horse and wagon to take him home in.

"I left Jack in the lower floor of the mill. When I got back to the bridge I was met there by a stranger, who told me he had come that way in his rig with a companion and had found Jack in the mill. He said he had sent him home in his wagon, and then, having learned from Jack that I had gone for some kind of vehicle, he had remained to tell me that Jack had gone. I accepted his statement, returned the horse and wagon to the farmer, and came straight on here for my gun and bag of game, and now you tell me Jack has not turned up yet," concluded Ben.

As Burling concluded his story the clock struck nine.

"I can't understand where that stranger's companion could have taken Jack," said Ben, beginning to feel that all was not right.

"Those men might not have been honest," replied Mrs. Jasper in an anxious tone. "The man who took him in his wagon might have done so to rob him, seeing that he was injured and could not well defend himself."

"They needn't have carried him off to do that. They could have just as well robbed him in the mill, though I don't believe they would have found much on him," replied Ben.

As he spoke it occurred to Burling that the man at the bridge, who was on the lookout for him, might have told him that yarn to send him away and prevent him from going into the mill after Jack, who he now suspected was there at the time.

That looked as if the man had had designs on Jack and, having learned from him that he expected his friend to

come back at any moment with a wagon, had gone to the end of the bridge to head him off.

Ben decided that Jack's continued absence looked serious enough to demand his return to the mill for the purpose of an investigation.

Without communicating his misgivings to Mrs. Jasper and her daughter, and simply telling them that he was going to look for Jack, he left the cottage and started for the mill, hungry as he was.

Ben, however, did not reach the mill that night.

He was knocked down in the dark by a rapidly driven buggy, and had to be taken home in a demoralized condition, though, fortunately, his injuries were not serious.

Mrs. Jasper and her daughter grew more and more anxious at the absence of Jack as the hours passed and he did not appear.

They usually retired about nine o'clock, but midnight came and passed and they were still sitting up in anxious suspense.

Finally the clock indicated half-past two in the morning, and the two women began to grow sick with the increasing load of worry.

"Something certainly has happened to him," cried the distressed mother. "He never would remain away like this of his own accord. What shall we do, Jessie?"

Before the young woman could reply there came a loud knock at the kitchen door.

Jessie rushed to the door and opened it, whereupon in limped Jack.

"Jack!" screamed his sister, throwing her arms around his neck and bursting into tears.

"Jack!" ejaculated his mother, rising from her chair, all of a tremble. "Where have you been?"

"I'll tell you all about it as soon as I've had something to eat," said the boy, throwing down his game bag and standing his gun in a corner. "There is nothing for you to worry about. I sprained my ankle, but it's much better now. I have had a rather strenuous experience at the mill and also at Adam Grimes's cottage, but I'm all right."

"Why, what were you doing at the Grimes house?" asked his mother, while his sister poked the dormant fire in the stove into life and put the kettle on to heat water in order to make her brother a cup of tea.

"You'll learn the reason in due time, mother. I intend to tell my story from the beginning, and then you'll understand everything. While sis is getting a bite ready for me I'll clean myself up, and after I've eaten you shall have all the particulars."

"Well, I'm thankful you're home, and that you do not appear to have suffered any great injury. Jessie and I have been greatly worried about you all night, but, thank Heaven, that's over now," said his mother, with a sigh of relief.

A frugal meal of cold meat, bread, butter and tea awaited Jack when he sat up to the table, and for awhile he devoted his attention to cleaning up the contents of the plates.

Then he sat back and began his story of his night's experiences.

Mother and daughter listened with breathless interest to the recital.

"You certainly put in a great night, Jack," said his sister.

"I did, and now I'm going to bed, and you two had better do likewise."

Before Jack got into bed his mother bathed his ankle with liniment and bandaged it up with a liberal dose of the same.

"I hope it will be all right in the morning," he said, giving her a good-night kiss.

"It ought to be much better," she replied, putting out the light and leaving the room.

The Jasper family slept late that morning, and Jack didn't make his appearance in the little dining-room until breakfast was on the table.

After the meal he went over to see Ben, and was surprised to find him laid up in bed.

"What in creation is the matter with you, Ben?" he asked the sufferer.

"I collided with a buggy and came off second best. And now tell me what the dickens kept you away from home so late?" asked Ben.

"Oh, a number of things," laughed Jack. "I didn't get home till half-past two, and found mother and sis worried to death about me."

"Well, I'd like to hear all about the matter."

"I'm ready to oblige you."

Thereupon Jack told Ben the story of his night's adventures.

Of course the engineer was astonished at his narrative.

He asked a string of questions, and then declared that Jack had done a big thing in getting away with the grip containing the counterfeit plates.

"You will surely get a reward from the Government. You must go out to the mill in a rig and bring that grip, my gun and game bag back with you right away. Then you must write to the Treasury Department at Washington, detailing all the facts of the case, and notifying the Department that the plates are now in your possession."

Jack said he would follow Ben's instructions, and after some further conversation he visited a friend, borrowed his horse and light wagon, and started for the mill.

He found the spot as deserted as usual, with no sign of Wambold about.

The articles he came after were in the bushes where he left them, and he took possession of them, and carried them to his house.

He returned the horse and wagon with thanks, and dinner wrote a long letter to the Secretary of the Treasury, which he posted without delay.

Then he went over to Ben's house to see how he was getting on.

"I'll be all right to-morrow," said Ben, who was sitting up in bed reading. "I narrowly escaped serious injury, but after all a miss is as good as a mile. The man who ran me down gave me \$100 to square the matter, and I let it go at that. The money will come in very handy until I pick up something to do. Old Grimes ought to give you somethin' handsome for savin' his niece and his money; but between me, you and the gate post it isn't at all certain that you'll get more from him than his thanks. I'm afraid it would break his heart to give up anything in the line of cash, so I wouldn't figure on it."

"I don't expect him to pay me for what I did," replied Jack. "If he should offer to pay me I would refuse to accept a cent. It was my duty to act as I did, and the knowledge that I succeeded in queering those rascals is satisfaction enough for me."

At that moment Millie Burling came to the door and said that there was a police officer below who wanted to see Jack.

"I've been over to your house several times after you," said the officer, when Jasper went to the front door. "You're wanted at the magistrate's court to appear as a witness against the man Spangler, who was arrested at the Grimes cottage last night."

"All right," replied Jack; "I'll go with you."

The counterfeiter's examination had been put off to await the arrival of Jack.

He found Bessie Bannister in the court, waiting to be called on to testify.

Jack shook hands with her and seated himself by her side.

The magistrate having been informed that Jasper was in court, he ordered the prisoner to be brought before him, and the proceedings were opened.

The testimony of Jack and Bessie was deemed amply sufficient to hold Spangler on the charge of burglary, and accordingly he was remanded for trial.

Jack said nothing about Spangler being a counterfeiter as well, as he guessed that was a matter for the United States authorities to attend to.

Jack walked home with Bessie, and allowed himself to be persuaded to stay and have supper with her.

They had just finished when Adam Grimes entered, grip in hand, after his purposeless journey to Eastlake.

He was surprised to see Jack Jasper, whom he only knew by sight, a guest of his niece, but he made no fuss about it.

When Bessie told him the story of the previous night, and explained the great obligation they both were under to Jack, his customary crusty manner relaxed, and he thanked the boy in a way that showed he meant it.

He made no offer to reward Jack, but he assured the boy he would not soon forget the service he had rendered Bessie and himself.

"Come and see us as often as you feel disposed," he said, as Jack rose to go. "Bessie and I will always be glad to see you. Who knows but I may be able to be of great use to you? At any rate, you shall have no reason to say that I am ungrateful to you for what you did for us last night."

Bessie accompanied Jack to the front door.

"I shall be happy to see you at any time you'd care to call, Mr. Jasper," she said. "I have scarcely any friends, for our neighbors seem to shun us on account of my uncle's reputation, which, as I told you last night, is wholly undeserved. So I shall be glad to have at least one friend in you if you think me worthy of your consideration."

"Worthy of my consideration!" replied Jack. "I consider myself honored by being permitted to call on you, and I shall be glad to have you consider me a friend."

Bessie smiled and offered Jack her hand.

Jasper took it, held it a moment or two, then wished her good-night.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH THE CANAL ROUTE IS DISCUSSED.

The story of the attempted robbery of Adam Grimes's cottage, and how it was frustrated through the plucky conduct of Jack Jasper, was duly chronicled in the one daily paper published in Camden, and it created a sensation, for, as we have before remarked, such a thing as a burglary in Camden and its environs was a rare occurrence.

Two officers had been sent to scour the neighborhood for miles around after Wambold, Spangler's companion in guilt, but they were unable to find him, so it was concluded that he had taken time by the forelock, and left that part of the State.

Some days later a quiet looking man, dressed like a business man, called at the Jasper cottage and asked for Jack.

He was told that the boy had gone off shooting on the marsh with his friend Burling.

"I will call this evening," replied the stranger, who then departed, leaving Mrs. Jasper wondering who he was.

Jack was finishing his supper when the stranger reappeared, and the boy invited him into the sitting-room.

"Allow me to introduce myself," and the visitor handed the boy an unsealed envelope.

Jack found the enclosure was a letter from the Secret Service Bureau at Washington, introducing Frank Brower, and instructing Jack to deliver to him the counterfeit plates and other articles he had secured at the old mill.

The writer added that he would be taken care of, which Jack understood meant that he would receive some monetary or other recognition for his services in the matter.

Accordingly the boy went to his room, brought the grip down and handed it to the representative of the Government Secret Service.

The visitor then asked him to tell all the particulars of how he had come by the plates and other things.

Jack told the full story, including the attempted burglary of Adam Grimes's cottage; which the counterfeiters had undertaken in order to raise the funds needed to purchase a press and other things needed to print the counterfeit notes.

The caller having obtained all he wanted, complimented Jack on his pluck, hinted that he would not be forgotten, and took his leave.

Next morning's paper contained the news of a fifteen per cent. reduction in the wages of every employee, except the executive heads of departments, on the D. & G. trunk system, of which the line running to Lathrop, Centerport and other points north on the western shore of the Salmon River, was an important branch.

The departmental clerks, station agents and the heads of the various mechanical branches accepted the reduction with the best grace they could, but the engineers, firemen and a host of other employees made a big kick, and seemed disposed to resist the mandate.

Meetings were held by the disaffected ones and committees waited on the various division superintendents to voice the objection of the men to the announced wage reduction.

The committees received one reply—that the business depression throughout the country caused heavy loss to

fall on the railroads, and the reduction was imperative and would be enforced.

Two weeks from the promulgation of the wage reduction order the engineers and firemen of the Centerport branch went on strike, and the whole passenger and freight service of this line was tied up as tight as a drum.

Not a wheel was allowed to turn except an engine and a postal mail car twice a day each way.

The engineers and firemen on the main line and other branches continued to report for duty, although the tying up of the entire system was threatened.

The Centerport branch, it developed, was to be used to test the power of resistance on the part of the company, because it was the only outlet by rail for the large ore shipments of the Esmeralda Copper Mines.

Of course the shippers and the general public raised a howl at once, for all towns along the line of the Centerport branch from Clayton Junction north were cut off from railroad communication with the main line.

These towns were nearly all on the river, but the railroad having put the old Salmon River Navigation Co. out of commission, there wasn't a steamboat running on the river to help the people out in this emergency.

Even had there been steamboats in readiness to equip a temporary service the unusual low water in the Salmon River that spring would not have carried them over the shallows at a place called Sasafax Bend, one mile below Camden.

Freight of all kinds, particularly the output of the Esmeralda Copper Mines, was held up by the strike, and every day the situation became worse.

Jack Jasper and Ben Burling were greatly interested in the outcome of the strike.

At the end of a week they found it was no nearer solution than on the first day that the men went out.

"Say, Ben, I heard to-day that if the company succeeds in getting engineers and firemen enough to begin moving its rolling stock the freight handlers will at once quit work," said Jack.

"I wouldn't be surprised if they did. The employees of the entire system are making a test case of the Centerport branch, which is a most important part of the line. If they can keep it tied up they may be able to bring the road to terms."

"The strikers, I hear, have plenty of money in the strike fund."

"Why shouldn't they when an assessment has been levied on the wages of every engineer and fireman working on the system, as well as on all the freight men and certain other employees? The strikers claim to be able to keep the fight up for an indefinite time."

"If they can make good their boast, what are shippers along the branch going to do to get their goods to market?"

"Ask me something easy, Jack," laughed Ben.

"If the old canal-boat company was in commission now it would be able to make a good thing out of this tie-up. Freight could be brought down from Centerport by the river, as of yore, carried through the canal and sent across Lake Cadillac to Eastlake, where the railroad is in full operation."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea if some enterprising person

resurrected the old line. If the strike lasted long enough he might make a barrel of money."

"That's my idea exactly. I'd like to do it myself if I had the funds to start the boats up. It would give us both a good job, at any rate."

"Do you think you could run such a transportation line?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Then why not call on old man Grimes and broach your idea? He owes you a debt of gratitude for saving his money-bags. If you put the matter to him right he might be willin' to back your scheme enough to put you on your feet."

"I've been thinking about it, Ben," replied Jack, with an earnest look. "I'll call on the old man's niece and have a talk with her about the matter first. She's a sensible girl, and is friendly toward me. She can tell me whether there is any use of me striking her uncle on the subject."

"That's right," nodded Ben. "Now is the time to work this idea up. It might prove the stepping-stone to your fortune."

"A canal route to fortune would be something new these up-to-date days when slow things don't work as a rule," laughed Jack.

"Well, the situation on the other side of the river is most unusual. You might say that the whole mechanical force of the D. & G. system is fighting to bring the company to terms by keeping the traffic of the Centerport branch stalled. The company is losing a lot of money every day, but the wages lost to the strikers is being made up to them by the assessment on the men working on the rest of the system. That puts the strikers on Easy Street, and will enable them to hold out indefinitely if they can keep the railroad from moving its rolling stock."

"The company is going to ask for the aid of State troops to keep the strikers from bribing or intimidating the new engineers and firemen who offer their services to the road, so the morning paper says."

"And I suppose the company will call on the courts to enjoin the strikers maintaining a picket line, and all that; but I'll wager the men are determined enough to find means of getting around all the difficulties they find themselves up against."

"They're in for a big fight in order to win their point, and the longer it lasts the better it would be for my canal idea," said Jack.

"Sure thing. It would give you the chance to build up a business that you might be able to continue even after the railroad settled the matter. The only thing that will be against you is the slow method of canal transportation; but then the canal is short, and the route to Eastlake direct. The Eastlakers would find it to their advantage to support you, and also the steamboat company on Lake Cadillac. All that you need is a backer in this, and old Grimes is the man. The trouble is he's closer than wax, but then the canal was originally his scheme, and a pet hobby with him. Put it up to him right and perhaps he'll see you through whether he can make any money out of it or not," said Ben, encouragingly.

"I will. I'll call on Miss Bannister this afternoon," said Jack, rising from his chair, with a newly-born feeling

of enthusiasm in what he considered a brilliant scheme, in which he thought he saw the chance of his life.

After dinner Jack Jasper started for the Grimes cottage.

His mind was filled with one absorbing idea—the canal scheme which the tangled condition of the Centerport branch of the D. & G. Railroad made feasible.

If anything was to be done it must be pushed at once, and Jack was determined to strike the iron while it was hot.

He was full of ambition, and had the determination of a great general of industry who sees the chance to make a ten-strike by a sharp and aggressive effort.

He pulled the old-fashioned bell handle and Bessie came to the door.

She smiled in a pleased way and invited him in.

"I hope I am not interfering with your household duties, Miss Bannister," said Jack; "but I wanted to discuss with you a matter of importance."

"Oh, I'm not very busy just now," she replied, leading him into the sitting-room, which was bright with sunshine and the faint odor of house plants.

She seated herself beside him on the lounge.

"To begin with, I believe you are a friend of mine and will give me the benefit of your advice and encouragement in a plan which, if I can put it through, may do great things for me," said Jack.

"You may depend on my friendship, Mr. Jasper, and if I can help you in any way I will gladly do it," she answered, with an expectant look.

"It is possible you may think my idea a bit ridiculous. If you do don't hesitate to point out any objection that strikes you," went on the boy. "It is natural for me to be over-enthusiastic about a scheme that strikes me as a winner."

"I will listen to you, but I'm only an inexperienced girl in matters of business, so I cannot promise you what value my advice or suggestions may be to you. My uncle would be better able to advise you than I, and I know he will gladly assist you, for he has taken a great liking for you. He has told me so. This is unusual for him to do, for he does not care to make new friendships. You appear to be an exception. He says he is sure you are a bright, ambitious boy, who will make your way ahead in the world. Indeed, he was talking about reviving his canal project in view of the present railroad situation across the river, and putting you in charge of the business if you were willing to make the venture."

"He was!" almost gasped Jack. "Why, it is about the canal route that I came to speak with you. I wanted to sound you on the subject to see if it was of any use for me to interview your uncle about it."

"Is it possible!" she exclaimed, with a look of surprise. "I am sorry that my uncle is out at present; but I would suggest that you call this evening and see him. If I am not mistaken he will be pleased to take the matter up with you. Were he a younger man I think he would start the canal route himself in view of the present circumstances. That, however, is out of the question; but if you have ambitious ideas connected with the canal I think he will help you in every way he can."

"I believe he still controls the right-of-way and has prevented the franchise from lapsing by running a boat from

this town to Jordan, and back once a month since the company went out of existence?"

"Yes. The canal route could be revived at any time if it paid to use it."

"Well, I'll tell you my plan, and you can let me know what you think of it," said Jack, who proceeded to outline the scheme he had in mind.

"I think it a very good plan," said Bessie, when he had finished, "and I feel sure my uncle will approve of it, and help you carry it out."

"You encourage me greatly, Miss Bessie—I beg your pardon, I should say Miss Bannister."

"You may call me Bessie if you wish," she replied. "Miss Bannister seems too formal between us, and you are almost like an old friend already."

"Thank you. So you really think your uncle will look favorably on my plan?"

"I really do. I know he is anxious to do you a service in recognition of the debt he feels we both owe you, so I would advise you to call and see him early this evening. I will tell him that you will call, and I will explain, in a general way, the object you have in view."

"I am greatly obliged to you, Miss Bessie."

"You need not be, for I am glad to be of any service to you," she replied in a tone which showed she meant it.

After talking awhile longer Jack went away.

CHAPTER IX.

TREATS OF A LETTER JACK RECEIVED AND HOW HE AND BEN VISIT WHITEHALL STREET.

Jack had finished his supper and was preparing to visit Adam Grimes for the purpose of laying his canal route scheme before him, hoping that he would be able to interest him in it, when his sister came to his room with a note which, she said, had just been left by a boy.

Tearing open the envelope, which was addressed in a handwriting unfamiliar to him, Jasper looked at the signature at the bottom of the brief communication.

To his surprise he saw that the writer was Adam Grimes.

At least that was the name signed to the note which ran as follows:

"Jack Jasper—I wish to see you this evening on very important business. You have done me a great service in saving my house from being robbed, and I want to repay you by putting you in the way of making a good deal of money. Don't fail to come as soon as you get this note, as I shall be waiting for you. You will find me at my office in the building No. 16 Whitehall Street. Come alone, as this interview will be private and confidential.

"Yours,

"ADAM GRIMES."

"I never heard that Mr. Grimes had an office, and Whitehall Street seems an odd place for him to be located," thought Jack, reflectively, as he read the note over again. "Why should he want to see me there at night, when his cottage would be ever so much better for a private and confidential interview? Still, he has the reputation of being an eccentric person, and I dare say he does things different from other people. I suppose Bessie has told him what I said to her about starting up the old canal route again."

and he thinks the idea such a good one that he wants to go over the matter with me where he has the books and documents of the old company on tap. Probably the reason he has a place of business in Whitehall Street is because the rent is cheap there, and he doesn't mind appearances. I know it is one of the poorest streets in Camden, and down along the river front. Laborers and stevedores live there with their families. It isn't a locality that I'm stuck on visiting at night, but I suppose I must do it if I want to secure the financial assistance and co-operation of Mr. Grimes."

Jack went downstairs, told his mother where he was bound and left the house.

As he was crossing the bridge over the canal he met Ben at the other end.

"Hello, Jack, I was just going over to your house," he said. "Were you coming to call on me?"

"No. I'm on my way to meet old man Grimes."

"Where do you expect to meet him?" asked Ben, in some surprise, for that wasn't the road to the Grimes cottage.

"At his office in Whitehall Street."

"Whitehall Street!" ejaculated Ben, still more surprised. "You don't mean to say he has an office in that locality?"

"That's what his note says."

"You got a note from him?"

"Yes. A boy left it at my house a little while ago."

"And he told you to meet him in Whitehall Street?"

"No. 16."

"I never knew before that there were offices in that street. It is the toughest section of Camden. I suppose you know that?"

"I know it, and I've been wondering how it happens that the old man has a place there. I suppose it's because he may own the building, or because the rent is cheap."

"Well, this is certainly a surprise to me. I supposed that he transacted all his business at his cottage. I don't see what he wants with an office, anyway."

"It might be the old canal company's office."

"No," replied Ben, shaking his head, "the canal company had their office on Wayne Street, near Washington."

"Well, I made an arrangement with the old man's niece to call at their house to-night in relation to my canal project, and was on the point of starting for the cottage when the boy left the note."

"Did Grimes say what he wanted to see you about?"

"He didn't state it in so many words, but I judge from what he did say that it is about the canal matter he wants to talk with me. He said that he wanted to repay me for saving his house from being robbed by putting me in the way of making a good deal of money. If he has decided to back me up in the canal scheme that will probably put me in the way of making a good deal of money."

"I see; but I should think his home would be the most convenient place for him to hold this interview."

"I think so, too; but he appears to have a different idea."

"He certainly acts a whole lot different from most people."

Jack and Ben were walking into the town while they carried on this conversation.

When they reached Barling's cottage Ben said that if

Jack had no objection he would walk with him as far as Whitehall Street.

"I haven't any objection," replied Jack. "In fact, I shall be glad to have you do so."

"I want to see where this office of Grimes's is."

"You can't come in, for he told me to come alone, as the interview was to be private and confidential."

"Oh, I don't want to butt in. I'm only curious to see where the old man transacts his business. Maybe he is doing something along the river front. He owns the three tugs that originally belonged to the canal company, but I supposed they were employed at Centerport. I guess it would be pretty hard to keep tab on Grimes, anyway. Instead of having his cash hidden at his cottage, as people think, it wouldn't surprise me to learn that he has it invested in some profitable river business. That would account for his having an office in Whitehall Street."

"That's so," nodded Jack. "There is a lot of business done on the river."

The two walked on, talking, their conversation drifting around to the possibilities offered by the revival of the canal route.

At length they reached Whitehall Street, and Jack began looking for No. 16.

It was a short, dirty-looking thoroughfare.

The whole of one side, where the odd numbers ran, was occupied with the cheapest kind of ramshackle tenements, filled with the poor class of Camden.

The opposite side, running between two wharves, was covered with similar kinds of buildings, in which lived the riff-raff of the town in boarding-houses of the lowest grade.

There were saloons sandwiched in between ship chandlery and junk shops, with here and there a restaurant that looked far from inviting to either Jack or Ben.

"I'd have to be pretty hungry to eat in one of those places," remarked Ben.

"I'd walk a long distance on an empty stomach before I'd do it," replied Jack. "Here's No. 16 now."

The number was inscribed in rude white figures, evidently the work of an unpracticed hand, over a narrow doorway leading into a narrow, dark and filthy hall.

It was the last building in the world where one would expect to find an office, and both Jack and Ben looked at it doubtfully.

"Are you sure you've got the number right?" asked Ben. "Maybe it's 116 in the next block, on the other side of that wharf."

"No. 16 is the number in the note," replied Jack.

"Well, if the old man has an office in this building he must be off his perch, that's all I've got to say," said Ben.

They noticed a rough-looking man lounging in the doorway, who eyed them sharply as they came up.

As they came to a pause opposite the doorway the fellow stepped forward and said:

"Are yer lookin' for Adam Grimes?"

"Has he an office in this building?" asked Jack.

"That's what he has. He's expectin' a young feller named Jasper to call here to-night. Are you the party?"

"That's my name."

"Yer was to come alone, wasn't yer?"

"My friend here thought he'd walk as far as the street with me."

"Yer friend kin go on then, and you kin foller me and I'll show you upstairs to the office."

"What part of the building is Mr. Grimes's office?"

"One floor up in the back."

"Well, Ben, I'll see you in the morning and let you know whether it was the canal scheme or not Mr. Grimes called me here to talk about," said Jack, smothering his repugnance to enter the building.

"I don't like the idea of you enterin' this place alone, Jack," whispered Ben. "Somehow I have my suspicions that all isn't just right."

"Nonsense!" laughed Jasper, who was pluck to the backbone. "What danger can there be to me?"

"Come on, young feller," interrupted the tough. "I'm waitin' fer yer."

"Good-night, Ben," said Jack.

Ben responded in a half-hearted way, and watched his companion and the tough enter the black hallway with some misgivings.

As they disappeared in the gloom he started reluctantly down the street.

After walking fifty feet he stopped irresolutely, and then as if he had come to a sudden resolution he turned about and retraced his steps.

CHAPTER X.

HOW JACK FINDS HIMSELF IN A TRAP, AND BEN COMES TO HIS RESCUE.

In the meantime Jack followed his tough guide up a rickety flight of stairs to the landing of the second floor.

A dirty oil lamp, suspended in a tin holder affixed to one of the walls, cast a dim, uncertain illumination around the head of the stairs.

The only other light to be seen was that which shone through a transom pane over a door at the end of the dark corridor.

Toward this the tough guided Jack, who was thoroughly disgusted with the surroundings and approaches to Mr. Grimes's place of business.

Racing the door, the tough knocked three times on one of the panels, and a voice, which did not sound like the old man's, responded, "Come in."

The fellow threw open the door and told Jack to walk in.

As the boy obeyed he followed him in, closed the door and shot the bolt.

In addition to the fact that the room did not show the slightest resemblance to an office, the action of the tough was so suspicious that Jasper instinctively felt that he had fallen into a trap.

Like a flash the thought now came to him that the letter had not been written and sent to him by Adam Grimes, but by some one else from sinister motives.

If that was true who could this enemy be, and what did he hope to gain by so artful a trick?

The answer came even as the thought passed through his brain.

Out of the gloom of the adjoining room stepped a well-dressed man.

One glance at his face explained everything to Jack.

The man was Wambold, the counterfeiter of the old mill.

"I am delighted to meet you again, Jack Jasper," he said, with an evil laugh.

"I suppose you wrote that letter, signed Adam Grimes, which brought me here to-night?" replied Jack, aggressively.

"Your supposition is correct, young man," chuckled the rascal.

"Well, now you've got me here what do you want with me?"

"To settle scores between us."

His answer was not very reassuring to the boy.

"You've done me a whole lot of harm, young man, and I'm going to get square. I wouldn't have minded your standing Spangler and me off at Grimes's cottage so much if you hadn't got away with those plates of the treasury notes. They represent weeks of skilled and laborious labor on the part of Spangler, and we counted on them to make the haul of our lives. I reckon we'd have done it if you hadn't butted in on us with your game foot. You've done us both up, for Spangler is sure of ten years for the cottage affair, and the deuce knows how many more when the Government takes him in hand, while I'm out of the fortune I expected to make."

"I don't see that you're entitled to any sympathy," replied Jack, boldly. "You knew what you were up against when you undertook crooked work."

"You evidently didn't know what you were up against when you stuck your oar into our business," gritted Wambold, with a black look.

"I did my duty and I'm not worrying about the consequences."

"You crow mighty loud for a young rooster; but I guess your crowing won't last much longer. Do you realize that you're in my power?"

"I probably am through treachery."

"The end justifies the means. What's to prevent me from killing you right here in this room?" added Wambold, taking a revolver from his pocket.

"Nothing, I suppose, if you've got murder in your heart," replied Jack, with a coolness which he did not altogether feel.

The rascal appeared a bit disconcerted because he showed no signs of fear.

"You'd better flop down on your knees and beg for your life instead of talking back to me."

"I guess it wouldn't do me any good," retorted Jack. "for you've probably made up your minds to do me up somehow."

"Right you are. However, I'm not going to shoot you. The report of a revolver might bring a policeman here, and that wouldn't suit us. I never make use of firearms when the same object can be reached by other and just as effective means. The river flows under that window. What more simple way of silencing you forever than to bind and gag you, tie a few pounds of old pig iron to your legs and launch you into the stream? One splash, which would not be noticed, and you would disappear forever from the world. How do you like that prospect, eh?"

The speaker grinned sardonically.

Jack didn't like the prospect a bit, but being grit to the

backbone he wasn't going to show the white feather before this rascal.

If he was fated to die he would take his medicine like a man, but he did not intend to yield up his life without a struggle.

"I asked you how you liked the idea of a cold bath this evening," continued Wambold, angry because his threat had failed to unnerve his victim.

"How would you like it?" retorted Jack, in clear-cut tones.

"I wouldn't like it any more than you do."

"You've got to die some day, and if you have a murder on your soul, you'll be worse off than I am at this moment," replied Jasper.

"No preaching, young man. I don't believe in none of your psalm-singing nonsense of a hereafter of fire and brimstone. When we're dead that's the end of us. You'll see your finish in a few minutes. As I suppose you're looking for a harp and a pair of wings in the hereafter you might mumble over a few prayers to pave the way ahead. I haven't any objection to you shuffling off in your own way if it will make you feel any happier. I'll be satisfied to know that we are quits."

During this interview the tough chap stood with his back against the bolted door, apparently unconcerned as to his connection with an affair that looked as if it was to end with a murder.

"Get that piece of rope in the next room, Higgins, and bind this chap. If he resists I'll help you," said Wambold.

The tough left the door and stepped into the adjoining room.

Jack instantly saw a chance for his life.

He stooped quickly, picked up a stool from the floor and flung it with an underhand swing at Wambold.

Then he made a dash for the door.

As he drew the bolt the rascal, who had evaded the stool by an agile jump to one side, sprang forward, grabbed him by the arm and pulled him back.

"Not so fast, my young friend," he cried; "we don't part company that way."

He swung the struggling Jack around with one hand, and finding that the boy was too much for such a grip he dropped his revolver on the table beside the lamp and seized him with both hands.

"Quick with that rope, Higgins. This boy is as strong as a young bull."

As he spoke the corridor door opened and Ben Burling, who had been listening and preparing for action outside, rushed in.

He snatched the revolver from the table and pointed it at Wambold's head.

"Throw up your hands or I'll put a ball through your head, you rascal," he cried, in a ringing tone.

At that moment Higgins appeared at the door with the rope.

He was staggered by the change in the situation.

Instead of coming to Wambold's side he darted back into the room, and making his way to a side door, let himself out into the corridor and ran downstairs.

Reaching the sidewalk he uttered a shrill, peculiar whistle, which soon brought several of his gang from their loafing place outside a neighboring saloon.

Hurriedly explaining matters, he led them upstairs to Wambold's assistance.

The counterfeiter was taken completely by surprise by the unexpected appearance and quick action of Ben Burling.

The tables had been turned on him so rapidly that it took away his breath.

"Let go of that boy and throw up your hands or I shoot as sure as I live this minute," spoke Ben again.

There was no doubt but he meant what he said, and with an imprecation of rage Wambold let Jasper go.

"Now, up with your hands, you scoundrel, and back up against yonder wall."

Wambold, trembling with fury at the desperate predicament he realized he was in, reluctantly obeyed, for his life was of more importance to him than anything else.

"You came just in time to save me, Ben," said Jack, with a feeling of deep gratitude toward his chum. "You must have followed me into the building."

"I did, because I more than suspected that you were walking into some kind of a trap. See if you can find something with which to tie this villain. Then we'll get the police to attend to him," replied Ben.

At that moment there came the sounds of many feet along the corridor outside.

The door was thrown open and Higgins and five of his gang entered the room.

Wambold welcomed their appearance with a thrill of satisfaction.

"Seize those chaps!" he shouted.

"Stand back!" cried Ben, swinging the revolver around and bringing it to bear on the toughs.

Higgins and his gang paused, for they were not anxious to stop a bullet.

Ben saw that notwithstanding the advantage rested on his own side the situation was a critical one.

He and Jack could hardly hope to escape by way of the street with so many to contest their retreat.

"Open the window yonder, Jack," he said, "and see if we can get out that way."

While Ben held the enemy in check with his weapon Jasper flung up the window and looked out.

"There is no escape this way except by jumping into the river," said Jack.

"Jump then and I'll follow you," replied Ben, backing toward his friend.

"Stop them!" shouted Wambold.

The toughs made a move to dash forward.

Ben fired straight at them and Higgins fell back with a cry of pain.

The bullet had passed through his hip.

The shot created confusion in the ranks of the enemy, and under cover of it and the smoke, Jack and Ben sprang in succession from the window into the dark and flowing waters of the Salmon River.

CHAPTER XI.

TREATS OF THE RESULT OF JACK'S VISIT TO ADAM GRIMES.

They sank like a pair of cannon balls, but came up quickly.

Both were good swimmers, and as soon as they located each other, they began striking out for the nearest wharf.

As they started off they glanced up at the second story window through which they had made their leap and saw it filled by the forms of the toughs.

Reaching the wharf, they easily climbed up to the string-piece and then stepped on to the planks.

"We had a close call that time," said Ben, rubbing the water from his eyes.

"I had the closest one," replied Jack. "Only that you came to my aid I'm afraid I never would have seen another sunrise. I owe you a debt of gratitude I never can repay."

"I'll never try to collect it," laughed Ben. "Now, step out lively. We must get away from this locality and keep our blood moving at the same time. We'll jog-trot it all the way home, and then we won't catch cold."

They started through the river front of the town at a smart gait, taking care, however, to give Whitehall Street a wide berth, and their wet and bedraggled appearance attracted some attention from many of the pedestrians they met along their route.

In due time they reached Burling's cottage, when Ben dropped out of the race after bidding Jack good-night.

Not wishing to alarm his mother and sister with a recital of his experiences that night, Jasper entered the house by way of the woodshed roof and the window of his room.

Undressing and giving himself a good rub-down, Jack got into a dry outfit and then made his way back to the yard.

Giving the gate a slam to announce his coming, he entered the house as if nothing of a startling nature had occurred to him, and neither his mother nor sister noticed anything unusual about him.

Next morning he called on Ben and they went to the police station together and told their story.

Officers were sent to investigate No. 16 Whitehall Street, but Wambold had in the meantime made himself scarce, while the Higgins gang prudently retired to their hiding places to wait till things blew over.

During the afternoon Jack sent a note to Bessie Bannister explaining why he had not called at the cottage on the night before as arranged, and telling her that he would surely be around that evening to see her uncle about the canal route.

He sent the letter by the son of a neighbor.

The boy brought back word that Mr. Grimes would be at home, and would look for him to call.

Jack called soon after supper and Bessie admitted him.

"My uncle is expecting you," she said. "He is in his room. Follow me."

She led him upstairs to the front apartment, knocked at the door, and Adam Grimes said, "Come in."

Jack entered the room and was greeted in a friendly way by the old man.

"Sit down," said Mr. Grimes. "My niece told me that you wanted to see me on a matter of business."

"I do. It is about the canal, the rights to which you control."

"I will hear what you have to say."

"I am out of work, with no immediate prospect of getting another situation. The strike on the Centerport

branch of the D. & G. road has put a plan in my head by which I think I could build up a good business if you were willing to back me. I have no capital to invest, therefore without your help I can do nothing."

"Well," replied the old man, "let me hear what your plan is, and how you propose to work it. If I think it feasible I promise to help you out."

"I propose to put the canal route into commission once more. While the strike is on it will relieve the business situation at Centerport if merchandise can be carried to Eastlake and reshipped there by rail. The strike has also tied up the Esmeralda Copper Mines. I have no doubt that if the boats were put in operation a profitable contract could be made with the mining company to transport its ore to Eastlake until the strike was broken or settled, and possibly afterward. As things stand now I could make my own rates. My first object would be to make hay while the sun shone, after that I would try to continue carrying freight on the best terms obtainable."

"Your idea is good," said the old man. "Go on."

"I would make an arrangement with the Lake Cadillac Transportation Company to carry the boats and lighters across the lake from Jordan to Eastlake and back. I am sure I could make good terms with the company, for its business is scarcely more than paying expenses at present."

The old man nodded approvingly.

"Then I would call on the leading shippers at Centerport and contract to carry their merchandise at a fair price down the river to the canal, through that route to Jordan, and across the lake to Eastlake. I would advertise in the Centerport and Camden papers, also in the Eastlake papers, for I should want to carry back goods bound for Camden and Centerport that could not get through by rail. From the present outlook the strike is going to be a long and stubborn one. I propose to take advantage of the crippled state of the Centerport branch and get my hooks into their freight traffic as deep as I can."

Jack went on outlining and expanding his idea, and Adam Grimes became deeply interested in his project.

"Your venture has the elements of success in it, Jasper," he said, "and I am favorably disposed toward it."

"I am glad you approve of it, sir."

"You are going to take Ben Burling as your general assistant?"

"That is my idea."

"Your choice is a good one, for he is an honest, straightforward young fellow."

"I have always found him such, sir, and I have known him several years."

"Well, you can go ahead, Jasper. I will back you with funds enough to give you a good start, then it will be up to you to pull through."

"Thank you, sir," replied the overjoyed boy; "but it must be understood that the money is in the nature of a loan, to be repaid out of the anticipated profits of the venture. I shall feel more independent to have it that way. I will pay you rent for the use of the boats you own, and whatever you think is fair for the right-of-way through the canal."

"That is a fair and business-like proposition. I will have a contract drawn up which we will both sign. That will put the success or failure of your own venture right

up to you. It will make you realize the responsibilities you have assumed in trying to make the business pay."

"Yes, sir. All I want is a fair chance to start the ball rolling. If I succeed it will be a satisfaction to know that I was not absolutely boosted into good luck through your backing alone."

"Your sentiments do you credit, Jasper, and make me feel all the more confident that you will come through with flying colors. I suppose you will start in at once."

"To-morrow morning, sir."

"I will loan you \$5,000 as a starter. Call here at eleven to-morrow and I'll have the money ready for you."

"I hope I will not need to expend so much as that, considering that you are going to let me have your boats and tugs."

"I will merely let you have the boats as they stand. You will have to pay all the expenses of running them. I expect you will need more than \$5,000 to get on your feet; but no matter, all you have to do is call on me and I will supply you with the sinews of war. It will be up to you to turn my assistance to the best advantage."

"I'll do it, you may depend on," replied Jack, in a resolute tone.

That closed the interview and Jack went downstairs to acquaint Bessie with the result of his talk with her uncle.

She was delighted that her new friend's prospects looked rosy, and told him that she would watch his progress in his venture with the utmost interest.

Jack then went home, feeling that Dame Fortune was beckoning him onward with smiling face.

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH WAMBOLD GETS A PART OF WHAT'S COMING TO HIM.

Next morning Jack called at Ben's house to acquaint him with the result of his interview with Adam Grimes.

Ben was tickled to death at his young friend's success in getting around the old man, and congratulated him over his prospects.

"I shall expect you to be my right hand man, Ben," said Jack. "I can't pay you large wages at the start, but just as soon as things are running smoothly I will take care of you. You won't have to strike to get more money."

"I'll stand by you, Jack, and do my best to make your canal route to fortune a big success. Don't worry yourself about my wages. What do you expect me to do?"

"I shall want you to be my superintendent of transportation."

"That sounds pretty big," laughed Ben.

"It will be a responsible position. I shall look to you to see that the boats get through the canal all right and across to Eastlake. I shall probably have my hands full running things at Centerport, and exercising a general supervision over the business."

"When are you going to start in?"

"Right away. I'm going to meet Mr. Grimes in half an hour. He has promised to loan me enough money to get things under way. I want you to meet me at my house immediately after dinner. I'm going to take a boat through the canal to Jordan this afternoon to kind of blaze the way. At Jordan I'm going to call on the managers of

the steamboat company and make arrangements for the towing of boats across the lake to Eastlake and return. I shall introduce you as my master of transportation."

"I suppose I must put on my best suit?" said Ben.

"No, you must put on your worst one, as I intend to do, for we will alternate at driving the mule which will furnish the motive power. You can bring your best suit to put on after we reach Jordan," said Jack.

"All right, old man. What you say goes with me."

Jack then departed to keep his engagement with Adam Grimes.

The old man had the money ready, which he handed to Jack, with a promissory note to sign.

Mr. Grimes then took him to the basin, where nine canal-boats were in charge of a caretaker.

He introduced Jack to the man and told him that he had leased the boats to the boy, and that he was to take orders from Jasper until further notice.

"I'm going to take one of the boats through the canal this afternoon," said Jack. "Have a mule on hand all ready for work."

"All right," replied the man, respectfully.

"I will have the contract ready for you to sign in a few days," said the old man, as they walked away. "In the meantime you can go right ahead. Here is your letter of introduction to Mr. Cole, of the Lake Cadillac Steamboat Company; and here is a letter introducing you to my agent at Centerport, who has charge of my tugs there."

"Thank you, Mr. Grimes."

"When you are ready to call on the manager of the Emerald Copper Mines I will get you a letter of introduction from the president of our national bank, which will pave your way for an interview."

"Much obliged."

"You can use the old company's office near the basin for your quarters in this town. There is a long shed to protect freight from the rain."

After leaving Mr. Grimes, Jack went to the office of the "Daily Times" and inserted the following advertisement:

SHIPPERS TAKE NOTICE.

On and after Monday, April 1,
Mdse. of all kinds will be carried to Jordan and Eastlake
via the Canal Route and Lake Cadillac, daily,
at LOW RATES.

For particulars call at the office of the Canal Transportation Co., at the Canal Basin, foot of Forrest Street.

JOHN JASPER, General Manager.

He left an order with a local printer for similar handbills which he intended to have distributed among the shippers of Camden and vicinity.

Then he went home to dinner.

Jack had finished his dinner when Ben and his sister appeared.

"Say, Jack, Millie wants to go to Jordan with us on the canal boat. Have you any objection?" asked Ben.

"Not the slightest. You will be as welcome as the flowers in May, Millie," replied Jasper.

"Thanks, Jack," laughed the girl. "I knew that you wouldn't turn me down."

"Well, we'll get on, then, as the trip, though a short route, will take us about all the afternoon. We'll stay

over night aboard at Jordan, but there is plenty of accommodation for you. You shall have the honor of cooking for us, or perhaps I should say that the honor will be ours of partaking of your admirable culinary efforts."

They started for the basin and found one of the canal-boats at the entrance to the canal, ready to proceed on its way to Jordan.

The stout mule which was to do the drawing was tied to a tree.

Millie was assisted aboard and Ben followed.

Jack unloosed the animal, attached the tow-rope to him and cried, "Gee-up!"

He started off as unconcernedly as though he had never done anything else in his life but haul canal-boats, while Jack, with a long switch, followed after him.

Ben and Millie seated themselves in the bow, and for awhile kept up a running conversation with Jack.

For the first mile everything went on well, and Jasper had no trouble with the mule.

The boat was now approaching the old mill, and would have to pass under the bridge.

Ben had gone aft for some purpose and Jack was about to call him forward to haul in the tow-rope as soon as he detached it from the mule to allow the boat to shoot the bridge, when a man suddenly sprang out from a bunch of bushes and rushed at Jasper.

The boy instantly recognized him as Wambold, but being off his guard, he was unable to put himself in a posture of defence before the rascal was upon him.

"I'll fix you, you young viper!" hissed Wambold, closing with Jack, and trying to force him into the canal.

Millie uttered a shrill scream which attracted her brother's attention.

He grasped a boat-hook and ran forward to Jack's assistance.

Jasper almost lost his balance, and would have been an easy victim but for his agility.

He managed to slip around, sink to his knees and grab Wambold by the thighs.

Before the fellow dreamed what was going to happen, Jack got a good hold on his legs, swung him around, and, exerting all his strength, pitched him headforemost into the canal.

There was a loud splash and Wambold sank out of sight.

Ben uttered a shout of satisfaction and looked at the spot where the man had disappeared.

Wambold reappeared almost immediately, for the water was not deep in the canal.

The side of the canal was only a yard from where he came up, and a couple of strokes brought him to it.

Jack, in the meantime, had to turn his attention to detaching the mule from the tow-line, as the bridge was at hand.

It had been arranged that Ben was to come to shore after tossing the line back to Jasper as soon as the bow of the boat passed clear of the bridge.

He made the toss, which Jack caught, and then he ran back, grabbed hold of the bridge and swung himself up on it.

Jasper hitched on the mule again and ran back toward the bridge, where he met Ben, handed him the switch, and was just in time to drop down on the roof of the boat's

cabin as the long craft passed clear of a wooden link that connected the two sides of the canal near the mill.

Wambold had gotten out of the water, and breathing vengeance against Jasper had made a second rush for him, when he found that the boy was now out of his reach.

Dripping and swearing like a trooper, he remained on the bridge and looked after the boat with an ominous gaze.

Finally he shook his fist at it and started for the mill, within the entrance of which Jack saw him disappear.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH JACK OUTLINES THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE CANAL ROUTE.

"Who was that man and what did he attack you for?" asked Millie Burling.

"You remember that two men attempted to rob Adam Grimes's house and that one of them was captured while the other escaped?" replied Jack.

"Yes."

"Well, that's the chap who escaped."

"Oh! He tried to throw you into the canal."

"That seemed to be his object, but I turned the tables on him, and he went in himself instead," laughed Jack.

"He was awful mad, wasn't he?" smiled the girl.

"Yes, he looked kind of mad. As a rule, people don't feel very good after getting the short end of things."

"Say, Jack," said Ben from the shore, "that was Wambold, wasn't it?"

"Yes, that was him all right."

"He's hanging around to reach you again. You'll have to send word to the police when we get back."

"I intend to, but it's likely he'll expect me to do that and will skip out to avoid capture."

"Looked to me as if he wanted to drown you in the canal."

"He certainly intended to throw me in, but the trick worked like a boomerang."

"You got out of your predicament very neatly, while he got more than he bargained for."

"He may get worse than that if he tackles me again," replied Jack.

The sun was sinking below the distant horizon when the canal-boat reached the end of the route at the town of Jordan.

Jack and Ben moored her in the basin, which was large enough to contain several boats like her, and stabled the mule in a small barn close by, which belonged to Mr. Grimes.

It was too late for Jack to attend to the business that had brought him over there, so it was postponed till morning.

He went ashore and purchased a supply of provisions, which Millie cooked in her best style.

They remained on deck talking about the new canal enterprise and other matters till nine o'clock, when they turned in for the night, there being a separate compartment for Millie to sleep in.

Next morning Jack and Ben put on their best clothes and about nine o'clock started for the office of the navigation company.

Mr. Cole, the manager, was in his private room when they arrived.

Jack sent in their names and they were admitted.

He handed Mr. Cole the letter of introduction he had brought, and then stated the object of his visit.

The manager was clearly surprised to learn that traffic through the canal was to be revived, and was pleased to hear that the co-operation of the steamboat company seemed to be a necessary factor in the plan.

He was ready to talk business with Jack, who introduced Ben as his superintendent of transportation, and they got together at once.

Jack wanted lower terms than the steamboat manager seemed disposed to give, but after a spirited talk they reached a compromise satisfactory to both sides.

"I'm going over to Eastlake on your noon boat," said Jack, "and will return by the last boat. Have a contract drawn up ready for me to sign by the time I get back, so that our business can be settled up ship-shape."

On their return trip to Camden, Jack told Ben that it would be his business to see that the boats kept moving, not only through the canal, but across the lake to Eastlake, and vice versa.

"You will see to it that my agents at Camden, Jordan and Eastlake attend to business right up to the mark," went on Jack. "You must visit shippers in Camden who regularly send merchandise East, and make them understand that the canal route has advantages for them at all times whether the railroad on the west shore is running or not. You must see Eastlake shippers who send goods to Centerport, and solicit their trade for the canal route. In fact, I rely on you to keep this end of my transportation business going in good shape."

"You're going to locate yourself at Centerport, eh?" said Ben.

"Yes, for that is the keystone of the situation. It is a big shipping point, and I shall fight to get and control as much business as I can handle from there. I will be in touch with the Esmeralda mines at that point, and if I secure a good contract from that quarter it behooves me to look after it and see that everything works smoothly in the direction of Camden, where it comes under your supervision."

"You talk like a general laying out a campaign."

"That's about what I'm doing. I'm laying out a business campaign."

CHAPTER XIV.

DESCRIBES JACK'S PROGRESS WITH HIS CANAL ROUTE.

Early next morning Jack crossed the river to Lathrop and hired a rig to take him up to Centerport, a distance of fifty miles.

He reached his destination early in the afternoon and registered at one of the hotels.

The first thing he did was to call on Mr. Ball, Mr. Grimes's agent, and present his letter of introduction.

He explained as much of his plans as he considered necessary, and the agent told him he thought the idea a good one as long as the strike on the railroad continued, but he did not see that the scheme would pay after that.

He told Jack that the tugs were at his service, and that

he could have one or all of them whenever he was ready to use them.

Jack told him to send one tug down the river to Camden right away.

As soon as it arrived at that town Ben had orders to send it back with six canal-boats in tow.

Sending the first two boats through the canal, Jack paid a hurried visit to his mother and sister.

Then he called at the Adam Grimes home, and was warmly welcomed by the old man and Bessie.

He recounted to Mr. Grimes all he had done so far, and explained what he still had to do to put his plan into full working order.

"You are certainly a smart boy, Jasper," said the old man, approvingly. "You haven't let any grass grow under your feet."

"Couldn't afford to do that, sir. I'm striking the iron while it is hot," replied Jack.

"That's the right way. Well, I have the contract ready for you to sign in duplicate, and that will complete the arrangements between us."

"All right, sir. I am going on to Eastlake to make a traffic arrangement with the P. & Q. line. I will only ship goods over the D. & G. where shippers insist, as the P. & Q. covers all points East as well as the other road."

Jack then explained his plans for the future, by which he hoped to control traffic even after the strike was over.

Mr. Grimes was pleased at his foresight.

He had never dreamed of the possibilities offered by the canal route if worked as an ally to the P. & Q. trunk line.

"You seem to have hit the keynote of the situation," he said. "The P. & Q. people will jump at this chance to cut in on the business of its rival. With the support and prestige of that road at your back, success ought to be assured. When are you going to call on the manager of the copper mines?"

"As soon as I've got things in perfect working order. I'm going to ask the general freight agent of the P. & Q. for special rates on copper ore on the ground that this is the chance for his company to secure the carriage of the output of the Esmeralda mines, of which the D. & G. road has heretofore enjoyed the monopoly. I am satisfied I will thus be able to quote a lower schedule to the manager of the mines than he has been getting from the D. & G. road."

Jack signed the contract by which he took a lease of all the property and rights of the old canal company now vested in Adam Grimes, and then went downstairs to have a brief talk with Bessie before starting for Jordan on horseback by way of the roundabout road.

"You're a busy boy now," said Bessie, with a smile.

"I should say I am, Miss Bessie. I've got just as much, if not more, than I can attend to. I've got a line of operation to look after extending from Centerport on the north to Eastlake on the southeast; but then I've got an able assistant in Ben Burling. I feel I can thoroughly depend on him, and that's a whole lot at this stage of the game."

"I should judge so. I am getting more and more interested in your canal venture every day, and so is my uncle. We have talked it over often since you started in. My uncle thinks you will make a success of it."

"Well, it seems as if I'm right in my element now. I'm

thoroughly interested in putting the thing through, and on much more extensive lines than I figured on at first."

"I suppose you will spend the larger part of your time in Centerport?"

"Yes. It is necessary that I make my headquarters there. That, however, will not prevent me visiting this place often as soon as trains are in operation again on the Centerport branch."

"I hope you will write to me when you are not able to come on here, for I want to keep informed of your progress," she said.

"I will gladly do that. And now I guess I'll have to go. It is getting late and I have to ride over to Jordan after supper so as to meet the boats when they arrive at that place."

Bessie went to the door with him, and their parting was of the friendliest kind.

Jack was delighted that Bessie showed so much interest in him, for he was already more than half in love with the beautiful girl, and her partiality for him induced him to build many air-castles in which she was the chief factor.

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH JACK IS HELD UP ON THE ROAD TO JORDAN.

Jack started for Jordan directly after an early supper at his home, and as his road led by the mill, on the opposite of the canal, he wondered whether Wambold was still in the vicinity.

Immediately after his return from Jordan on the canal-boat he had notified the Camden police of his run-in with the rascal on the bank of the canal near the old mill, and officers were sent out to look him up again.

They failed to find him, though they searched the mill from cellar to roof, and the neighborhood pretty thoroughly also.

Jack, however, had the idea that Wambold was not very far away.

There were hiding places in the woods where he could readily keep concealed with more or less success.

The possibility of meeting the rascal on the road induced Jasper to carry his revolver, and caused him to keep his wits about him as he rode rapidly along.

It was nearly dark by this time, but that fact didn't worry Jasper any, for he knew the road well, and there was no danger of losing his way.

Suddenly a figure jumped out into the road before him and waved his arms and hat in a wild way, like a person trying to stop a runaway.

Jack's horse was frightened by the apparition and reared up.

The man, whoever he was, sprang forward and seized the animal by the bridle.

"What in thunder is the matter with you?" demanded Jasper, wondering if he had run across an escaped lunatic.

"Get down," cried the stranger, in a menacing voice. "Get down or I'll blow your head off."

Jack looked keenly at the fellow through the gloom, and then it flashed across the boy's mind that he was up against Wambold again.

He saw that the fellow had a weapon in his hand, and matters looked serious.

"Are you going to get down of your own accord or shall I bring you down with this six-shooter?" said the man in an ugly tone.

"I'll get down," replied Jack, thinking of a plan to outwit the rascal.

"Then do it."

Jasper quickly dismounted, but it was on the opposite side of his horse.

The moment he got the animal between him and Wambold he drew his own revolver, and stepping around the horse pointed it directly at the man.

"Let go of that bridle and git," he ejaculated.

The rascal was taken all aback.

"Drop that gun of yours, and drop it quick!" cried Jack. Instead of obeying the fellow raised his arm and fired quickly.

The bullet shaved the boy's ear.

The smoke had hardly cleared from the revolver before Jasper returned the fire, and with better results.

The man staggered back and sank to the ground with a cry of pain.

As Jack stepped forward he heard the sound of wagon wheels approaching along the road.

Flashing a match he knelt beside the wounded rascal.

The light also illuminated his own features.

"So it is you, is it?" snarled Wambold, in spite of the pain he was suffering.

"Do you mean to say that you didn't know me in the dark?" asked Jack.

Wambold's reply was a fierce imprecation.

"Are you hurt much?"

"You've hurt me enough," snarled the counterfeiter.

"I am sorry I had to shoot you; but I was obliged to do so in self-defence."

At that moment a rig approached them through the gloom, and the driver reined in with a sharp "Whoa!"

"Hello!" came a voice. "What's the trouble?"

"I've shot a highwayman," replied Jack.

"The dickens you have," ejaculated the driver, dismounting and coming forward.

"Are you going direct to town?" asked Jack.

"I am. May I ask who you are?"

"Jack Jasper. I live on the outskirts of Camden, beside the canal."

"Ah! You're the young chap who got hold of those counterfeit plates and turned them over to the Government?"

"Yes," replied Jack, wondering who this man was, for he had not mentioned anything about the counterfeiting business to anybody save Ben Burling, his mother and sister, Adam Grimes, his niece and the Secret Service man, and he was pretty sure they had not spread the news about.

The town authorities were holding Spangler only on the charge of attempted burglary.

"Maybe this is the man I'm looking for," said the stranger, striking a match and taking a view of the wounded rascal.

"The man you're looking for!" ejaculated Jack, in surprise. "Who are you?"

"My name is Smith. I belong to the Government Secret Service. I'm here on a still hunt after Dave Wambold, Spangler's associate in the counterfeiting business."

"Well, Mr. Smith, this is your man. This is Wambold," replied Jasper.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"I'll allow you ought to know him."

"Yes, I know him all right. You heard two shots, didn't you, as you came along?"

"Clearly," replied the Secret Service man.

"The first shot was fired by him, and the bullet nearly put me out of business. I couldn't have a closer call and escape without a scratch. There's his revolver in the road."

The Secret Service man picked up the weapon and saw that there was one empty shell in the cylinder.

"If it had been daylight he couldn't have missed me," went on Jack. "I shot him to prevent him making a mark of me a second time."

"You did right. Every person has the right to defend his own life. Is he badly hurt?"

"I couldn't say how badly hurt he is."

The officer knelt beside the groaning rascal and examined his wound.

He found that Wambold was not seriously injured.

"Help me put him into the wagon, Jasper," he said. "I've been around this locality for ten days looking for him. I'm much obliged to you for helping me bag him, and shall notice you favorably in my report to the Bureau. When the case is wound up against the two men the Treasury Department will doubtless reward your services in the matter."

Jack assisted the officer to put Wambold into the wagon, where he was handcuffed as a matter of precaution.

The Secret Service man then bade the boy good-night, and drove off toward Camden, while Jack remounted his horse and continued on his way toward Jordan, where he arrived in due time without further adventure.

Jack put up at a small hotel, and after breakfast next morning went over to the basin to have a talk with his agent.

He found the two canal-boats moored, waiting to be towed across the lake by a small steamer belonging to the navigation company.

Jack did not go with them, but took the regular steamer over, which landed him more than an hour ahead of the boats.

The first thing he did was to call on his Eastlake agent.

The young man told him he had had many applications from shippers to forward freight to Centerport, and he had made arrangements with all of them to handle their merchandise as soon as the service was fairly started.

He pointed out some freight that had already reached the wharf, and was covered with a spread of canvas.

"There will be two boats in here in the course of an hour," said Jack. "Start gangs at work unloading them the moment they arrive. At the same time send word to those shippers who have goods to forward to Centerport to get them down here as soon as possible. When the first boat is unloaded start men loading her with merchandise intended for Centerport. In the meantime get the trucks down here to cart the through freight to the railroad depots, but don't let any trucks get away until I telephone you."

As soon as he had finished with his agent Jack called on the local freight agent of the P. & Q. Railroad and had a long talk with him.

During the interview several dispatches passed between the agent's office and the office of the general freight agent in Chicago, where the main offices of the company were situated.

Jack's proposition to throw all through freight from Centerport bound East into the hands of the P. & Q., particularly his intimation that he intended to try and secure a contract for carrying the output of the Esmeralda mines, captured the attention of the general freight agent, and he authorized the local agent to enter into a liberal traffic agreement for one year with the Canal Transportation Co.

Jack immediately telephoned his agent to forward all merchandise not specially marked D. & G. to the P. & Q. freight depot.

He then called at the D. & G. freight offices.

The agent was clearly surprised to learn of the revival of the old canal route, but presumed that it was merely a temporary expedient to relieve the freight blockade at Centerport.

After communicating with the general agent in Chicago, he made a satisfactory agreement with Jasper, the arrangement to terminate when the D. & G. road was able to carry its freight trains once more over the Centerport branch.

Jack then phoned his agent to send all D. & G. freight to the depot of that road until further notice.

After dining, Jasper returned to the dock and found that the steamer was bringing in the third canal-boat from Centerport.

This was the one which had unloaded a part of its cargo at Camden, and a small portion at Jordan, but carried mostly through freight to Eastlake.

The Canal Transportation Co.'s dock presented a busy appearance, and attracted a lot of attention.

All the idle stevedores got wind of the situation and hurried there looking for work.

They were hired by the hour, and as many put on as could be used with advantage.

Jack was pleased to find that his agent was making things pan out in great shape, and was satisfied that his Eastlake terminal was in competent hands.

The agent was instructed to make daily reports and remittances to the Centerport office via the captain of one of the canal-boats.

Returning to Jordan by an early afternoon boat Jack rode back to Camden.

He called at the Grimes cottage after supper and reported his progress up to date to the old man.

"You have got things in shape in a mighty short time for so important an enterprise," said Mr. Grimes, with an approving smile.

"That's the way to do business, sir," replied the boy, cheerfully.

"When are you going back to Centerport?"

"In the morning with the first two boats from Eastlake."

Jack found Bessie awaiting him in the sitting-room and he spent an hour with her, after which he went home.

He got an early breakfast and then rushed over to Ben's house.

Burling was expecting him, and they walked to the office near the canal basin.

Ben said he had been around among the people who had goods to ship East, and they expressed themselves as glad of the chance to send them by the canal route.

Since the strike had held up freight shipments several of the Camden manufacturers had been obliged to cart merchandise by road to Jordan, take it across the lake on the steamer and carry it to the depot in Eastlake.

This took a great deal of time and did not pay, therefore any method that would save them from doing this was welcome.

"The shippers told me they would be glad to continue with the canal company even after the strike was settled if their goods could be delivered promptly at the freight yards in Eastlake, as this would save them the trouble of sending their wagons across to Lathrop by ferry, and the customary delays the wagons met with at the freight yard," said Ben.

"Well, all you have to do is to show them that we will carry all freight to Eastlake from this place a great deal quicker than they can get it around there by railroad via Lathrop," replied Jack. "Give it to them strong, old man. Now is the time to get our wedge in while the railroad is helpless."

While Jack was talking with Ben a messenger came to inform him that his presence would be required at court to testify against Wambold at his examination.

Jack was greatly vexed at this summons, but there was no way of evading it.

Three more boats full of freight had come down from Centerport late the previous afternoon, and Ben had sent them through the canal.

The remaining three boats would leave Centerport about the time that the two boats started up from Camden.

Jack figured that things were moving about as well as could be expected.

Two tugs would be enough to keep his boats moving up and down the river.

"Don't hold the boats for me, Ben," said Jack, as he prepared to start for the court. "I'll stay over till the next batch from Jordan comes through the canal."

"All right," replied Ben.

Jack went to court, gave his evidence against Wambold, and returned to the basin to find that the two boats had arrived and departed an hour since.

Then he and Ben went home to dinner.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

The three boats from Centerport were in sight when Jack and Ben got back to the basin.

"Crandall must have got the boats off early this morning about daylight," remarked Jack. "That's the way I like to see business done. I think I am fortunate in my agents. Jenkins, of Eastlake, is a hustler, and Billy Brown, whom I sent to represent me at Jordan, appears to be all right."

"I must say that no man could have got things working

quicker and more systematically than you have done in the short time the route has been in commission," said Ben.

When the three canal boats arrived it was found that they carried nearly a dozen passengers who wanted to get to Eastlake.

Crandall had charged them \$2 fare, and had put provisions aboard so that they could dine at the rate of fifty cents a meal.

The captain of the tug brought a letter to Ben and another to be forwarded to Jasper if he wasn't at Camden.

The boats were full to their hatches and carried some light merchandise on their decks to be landed at Camden.

They were dispatched through the canal one by one as soon as possible, and Billy Brown, at Jordan, advised by phone of their coming.

Word was received from Brown that one boat was on its way through the canal to Camden with freight for that town and Centerport.

It was expected to arrive about dark.

"Get a lot of naphtha torches and hire a night gang, Ben. I want her to go up the river to-night. I'm going with her," said Jack.

Jack reached Centerport at eight next morning and found the wharf stacked full of freight ready for shipment by the Canal Transportation Co.

The railroad situation was not much changed, though the company was trying to move trains with the help of the State militia.

At the end of the first ten days the canal route was moving as smoothly as a finely adjusted machine.

The receipts were large and Jack's profit considerable.

Jasper was now ready to tackle the problem of the copper ore transit.

The mines had been compelled to shut down owing to the inability of the company to ship its product.

Train loads of it had been stalled for three weeks at different points between the mines and Clifford Junction, and there was no immediate prospect that it would soon be moved.

Jack visited the mines and made a proposition to the manager.

"I will agree to carry your ore to Eastlake and ship it via the D. & G. until the strike is over for so much a ton," he said, mentioning a stiff figure; "or I will enter into a year's contract with you, with a renewal clause, to carry all your output to Eastlake, and ship it East via the P. & Q. for such a price," naming a fair rate. "Take your choice, or turn both down, as you choose."

The manager considered awhile and then demanded better terms and a guarantee.

"I have given you my best and only terms, Mr. Powers," replied Jack. "Give me a regular contract and the P. & Q. road will guarantee prompt carriage from here to any destination east of Eastlake."

"If I give you a contract that will cut the D. & G. road out entirely," replied the manager.

"What do you care? The D. & G. has put you in a hole. The P. & Q. is just as big and important a line as the D. & G. My transportation company is the link that will connect you permanently with the P. & Q."

"But a canal route is slower than molasses."

"My canal route is short and direct. It takes thirty hours at the best for the D. & G. to carry a train of ore from these mines as far as Eastlake. I'll do as well and include transshipment.

"I must submit your proposition to the president of the mine at Centerport."

"All right. You can communicate the result to me at my office in the same place, foot of King Street. I have everything to start in at once in case we come to terms. If we don't there is no harm done."

On the following afternoon a messenger called at the office of the Canal Transportation Co. and told Jasper he was wanted at the general offices of the Esmeralda Copper Mines, on Washington Street.

He called there and was ushered into a room, where he found the manager and the president.

The latter questioned Jack closely.

He had already telegraphed the general freight agent of the P. & Q. at Chicago to know if the road would back up the Canal Transportation Co.

A reply came while they were talking.

The general freight agent said that the company had a traffic agreement with the canal company, and that he would guarantee the carriage of ore from tidewater at the mine to all points east on a two years' contract made between the Esmeralda Company and Jack Jasper.

The president of the mine, after some further discussion, authorized the manager to enter into the said contract with the Canal Transportation Co.

With the contract for carrying the whole output of the Esmeralda mines in his possession, Jack's canal venture became an assured success.

The officials of the D. & G. road were paralyzed when they learned about it.

They compromised the trouble with their employees, and when the strike was declared off the company called on the Esmeralda Mining Company to fulfil its contract, which had yet many months to run.

The president of the mine replied that not only was the contract broken, but that the company was about to sue the D. & G. road for damage incurred through the delay in the forwarding of several train loads of copper ore.

The railroad brought a counter suit, but lost in both cases after months of time spent in appeals to higher courts.

The D. & G. road, in the meantime, was chagrined to see thousands of tons of copper ore tapped in its own territory by its rival, the P. & Q., through the instrumentality of Jack Jasper and his canal route.

Not only that, but Jack held on to nearly all the big Centerport shippers after the strike, which was another body blow for the D. & G. line.

The company cut rates down in a futile attempt to put the canal route out of business.

The profit Jack made out of the copper transit enabled him to meet every cut made by the railroad company.

In the end the railroad had to throw up its hands and share the Centerport business with the Canal Transportation Co.

By that time Jack was quite an important person in the transportation business.

He was making big money and saving it with visions of expanding his facilities and gathering in more trade.

With the help of Adam Grimes he bought the Lake Cadillac Transportation Co., and added it to his system, thus making his line complete between Centerport and Eastlake.

To-day Jack Jasper is a big man out West, and his name is often seen in the daily press.

The canal route is out of business, as an improved transportation arrangement, devised by Jack, is in operation between Eastlake and Centerport via the old route.

Jack owns two big specially constructed ferryboats, one of which carries freight trains across Lake Cadillac between Eastlake and Jordan.

Five miles of railroad follow the course of the old canal from Jordan to Camden, and the cars are run direct from the boat to the tracks.

The rail line then runs north fifty miles to the new town of Egypt, opposite Centerport, where the cars are taken across the river in the second big ferryboat.

Jack also leased the road running to the copper mines from the D. & G. company, which had no use for it after the boy had cut them out of the copper traffic.

Jasper is president of the company which owns the railroad and ferryboats.

The company carries passengers between Centerport and Eastlake, via a regular ferry across the Salmon River to Egypt, thence by rail to Jordan, and by boat to Eastlake, but its main business is in freight.

All the freight cars bear the initials of the P. & Q. road, and it simply acts as a connecting link for the P. & Q. line, and its profits come from the charge per car it receives from the trunk line for carrying the cars between Centerport and Eastlake.

Jack lives in a fine house in Camden, and the charming lady who presides over it was once Bessie Bannister, to whom Adam Grimes left all his money when he died.

We must not forget to mention that Jack received a reward of \$5,000 from the Government for capturing the counterfeit plates, but that came to him at the beginning of his successful canal venture, and helped to make him independent when he needed money to meet the big expenses of the canal route, which ultimately led to his fortune.

THE END.

Read "AFTER BIG MONEY; OR, TURNING THE TABLES ON THE WALL STREET BROKERS," which will be the next number (188) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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GOOD STORIES.

In the British Museum are three copies of the Bible written on the leaves of the fan palm. It is astonishing how many different kinds of material books have been written on. There are still preserved works written on oyster shells, flat bones, bricks, tiles, ivory, lead, copper, and iron.

Harry Ellefson, a student at the Racine High School, has the State record for writing bogus excuses. In four years he has presented to his teachers seventy-four excuses, all written by himself. Every conceivable reason was given for absence. In the four years he lost seventeen grandmothers. About forty times he was supposed to be ill. When the discovery was made the student was called in by Principal Blackhurst and admitted his guilt. He has been suspended for seventy-four days.

Hut-cho-nu-pah, last of the medicine men, died last month in the Snake Hills of the Creek Nation. He was 96 years old. For half a century he had been one of the most turbulent spirits in Oklahoma. Hut-cho-nu-pah led the last rebellion of the Creeks in 1890. His faction was subdued by the Creeks themselves before the United States troops got there. In a battle Hut-cho-nu-pah's band was annihilated and he was condemned to death. So great was the awe in which the old medicine man was held that no one could be found to be his executioner. With his adherents dead and himself imprisoned, his influence was so potent that he compelled the election of a friend as chief and was pardoned. The medicine man fought for the Northern forces during the Civil War. He always asserted that he was under the special protection of the Supreme Being.

Bananas were first imported into Europe on a large scale from the Canary Islands. Until a few years ago they successfully met the competition of the Antilles and the coast of Africa. But a disease has spread in the banana cultures, and exportation has fallen off in alarming measure. As the banana figures prominently in the food of the town population of England, the British government appointed a commission to investigate the causes of the degeneration of this useful plant. According to the report of this commission, the planters have only themselves to blame; they have given the soil no rest for years past, nor practiced any rotation of crops. Confident of the proverbial richness of their soil, they have applied no fertilizers. The enfeebled plants have fallen a prey to a disease known as *Cloesporium masarum*, which is gradually gaining a foothold in all plantations. The report closes with

the observation that the disease is 'successfully fought by' a proper application of fertilizer to the soil.

The famous tree houses of Papua are rapidly disappearing before the march of civilization and settlement in the colony. The tree house—a neat and well built habitation, placed at an enormous height among the branches of a forest tree and reached only by a swinging ladder—was primarily intended, as a refuge from enemies. Now, however, that the Government has bought the wild tribes under control the native prefers to live in a house that demands less skill in construction. There are still many tree houses to be seen, though few or none are being built. In the northeastern district of Papua (where much valuable sugar, rubber and cocoanut land lies ready for taking up) the Government officials on their regular tours of inspection often sleep at night in the house of some hospitable native village constable, who draws his ladder up at sundown to a doorstep eighty feet high in the air. These tree houses are exceedingly cool, clean and picturesque with the roofs of native made thatch and walls and floors of wattled boughs.

JOKES AND JESTS.

Letter to a Schoolmaster—"My son will be unable to attend school to-day, as he has just shaved himself for the first time."

"Do you know that a gaseous emanation from radium is transformed into helium, Miss Elderly?" "No, Mr. Jinks. I'll just bet you're talking love to me in Latin."

"The very day I first met him," said Miss Plane, "something told me he would eventually fall in love with me." "Indeed?" replied Miss Knox. "The something wasn't your mirror, was it?"

"Now," said the teacher, who had been giving an elementary talk upon architecture, "can any little boy tell me what a 'buttress' is?" "I know!" shouted Tommy Smart. "A nanny goat!"

Judge—You were most brave in capturing the burglar, Frau Wachtig, but to injure him so severely was hardly right of you. Witness—I didn't know he was a burglar at all. I had waited up nearly three hours for my husband, and thought the robber was he.

"Come, come!" cried the brusque and hustling real estate man. "Why do you pay rent when you might own a home?" "I—I don't pay rent," replied the startled stranger. "Then you own a home?" "No." "That's strange. May I ask your business?" "I'm a real estate dealer."

"Oh, John!" said Mrs. Popley. "You must raise a pair of those long side-whiskers." "What!" exclaimed Popley. "Why, I thought you detested that sort of——" "Yes, but Mr. Dubley was here to-day. He has them, you know, and it was just too cute to see the way baby pulled them."

They were discussing the relative position of various countries as musical centres. Germany seemed to have the most votaries, much to the evident displeasure of one excitable Italian, who wished his own country to carry off the palm. "Italy is turning out the most musicians, and has always turned out the most," he cried. "Ach Gott!" exclaimed the German present, "can you plaine dem?"

The Mountain Maniac

By Alexander Armstrong.

Not many weeks ago business called me to West Virginia, and one afternoon, quite late, I stepped from on board the cars and found myself in the little village of—well, we will call it Bluebell.

I had never been there before, and as a stranger always does, I looked about me to see in which direction to go to most quickly find a hotel, for I never ask any favors in the way of directions if I can avoid so doing.

Like all other country villages, it had a main street, and that one glance told me was stretched away before me, the railroad depot being at one end of it.

I had gone but a block or two, when I saw the hotel some distance ahead, and before it a crowd of men and boys, all appearing to be greatly excited, and crowding around some object lying on the ground.

Reaching the spot I elbowed my way through the crowd until I caught a glimpse of this object; it was the dead body of a man, curled up, his knees almost touching his forehead, as if he had doubled himself up in a spasm and thus died.

The next great object of attraction was a fine-looking, well-made man, with a frank, open face, sunny, but stern-looking blue eyes, and a wealth of tawny beard, but which was now torn and dirty; his hair also was considerably mussed, and one cheek looked as if it had been clawed by some wild animal, while across his scalp was an ugly looking gash.

"Fight?" I inquired.

"No, sir," replied an urchin. "Though it was a fight, too—a regular out and outer. You see this chap curled up here is the Mountain Maniac, and t'other un tracked him to the mountain and kerflumixed him."

I turned away after another glance at the dead body of which I took a mental photograph. A short, thick-set body, a lengthened, cadaverous, beardless face, immensely long and singularly muscular arms, and a hunched back; his legs were encased in a pair of top boots such as are used by cavalry officers, and about his waist was a broad leathern strap, by which he was accustomed to support his pants.

Entering the hotel, I ordered some supper, and while it was being prepared sat down and penned the following:

"HARVEY DUBARRY, Esq.—Although not personally acquainted with you, the name of Goble may strike you as familiar, inasmuch as I have heard my father frequently mention your name as being an old school-mate and chum. It would give me great pleasure to meet my father's old friend, and as a younger scion of the Goble race, renew the intimacy of yore.

Yours sincerely,

"ORRIN GOBLE."

I found a boy who agreed to deliver the note and bring me an answer, which proved to be a very cordial invitation to come and remain with him during my stay in Bluebell; the whole tenor of the note was so cordial that after supper I sent my baggage ahead, and shortly afterward rang the door bell of Dubarry's house.

In answer to my ring, the door was opened by the bruised and torn man I have described as the second object of attraction.

"You're a genuine Goble and no mistake," he said, after a single glance at me. "Come in—come in—welcome here."

Shaking hands with me first he led the way into what was

evidently the parlor or best room of the house; not a "parlor," to look at and admire, but a parlor for use, a cosy, comfortable room where one could enjoy a segar and a quiet chat.

We found there Mrs. Dubarry and several little Dubarrys, among them a little girl, looking very pale, and propped up by pillows in a chair.

"Is she ill?" I inquired.

"No," replied my host. "But she has been away from home for a couple of days, and got badly frightened. I'll tell you about it after awhile."

"Has it anything to do with the Mountain Maniac?" I inquired.

He nodded his head.

Well, at last Mrs. Dubarry hustled the children off to bed, then came back and took Gracie from among the pillows, and carried her to her father for his affectionate good-night kiss, after which he followed her with his eyes until she disappeared, then exclaimed with a sigh:

"Thank God!" and then turning to me, remarked: "That was more than I could say this time last night."

"Tell me about it," I suggested.

"Well, I will," said he, clearing his throat. "Ready?"

"Yes."

"Then here goes:

"Two years ago, my friend, this little village was thrown into a state of the wildest excitement by the sudden disappearance of a little boy.

"He had gone to visit an uncle, who has a farm several miles away. His father learned afterward that the little fellow had left his uncle's shortly before sundown, calculating that by brisk walking he would arrive at home by tea-time, or before they would have finished the meal.

"They thought nothing strange of it when Charlie failed to reach home that night, thinking he had remained at his uncle's, but the uncle chancing to come to the village the next day, exploded his fond parents' belief in his safety.

"Instantly a searching party was organized, and I was one of the number. For three days our search was unavailing, and then——"

I saw Dubarry shudder at the recollections crowding in upon him.

"——we finally came upon a spot in the woods where there had been a camp fire; beside it were some bones, a few fragments of flesh which had evidently been wasted, and—little Charlie's clothing.

"How this had occurred—who had done it—were questions involved in mystery. That it must have been done by a human being was evident, but who or what or where was the demon?

"We scoured the woods thoroughly for many days, but could find no trace of the wretch who had perpetrated such an awful deed, and at length we all began to imagine that it had been done by some strolling tramp who was miles away from the scene before we found the ghastly remains of little Charlie.

"We were lulled into a sense of security as regarded our little ones, and once again began to permit them to run around as they had been accustomed to, but, ah! how soon was that sense of security shaken! A little toddling girl, carried by an elder sister to the woods, was left alone for a few minutes.

"When the elder child returned her little sister was missing!

"She rushed hither and thither, madly calling for Bessie. She heard Bessie's voice shrieking with terror, and it was followed by a screech which made her blood curdle! But love for her little sister overcame her fear, and dashing in the direction of the voice she caught a glimpse of Bessie in the arms of the Mountain Maniac, just before he disappeared from sight in a clump of bushes.

"We could not find the maniac, but we found the remains of

a fire, a dress and a tiny pair of shoes and a few bones. - These told the sad tale.

"A month later another child disappeared, and men armed themselves and patrolled the mountains for weeks, but without ever even catching a glimpse of the cannibalistic maniac.

"We heard nothing of him during the winter, but before the succeeding summer's course was run, nearly half a score of children had disappeared—roasted like young pigs—in his maw.

"Traps were set for the maniac; every man carried fire-arms, prepared to meet him, but he shrewdly kept out of their way; once, indeed, a party of four men caught a glimpse of him, but he was gone before they could draw a bead on him.

"So time rolled on, and the present season opened.

"All summer long he had evaded those set to slay him; he became bolder, showed himself not infrequently, and, with mocking laugh, could get out of the way before they could shoot.

"Not a man among us but trembled for the safety of his children, and no man more than I; and I never permitted my children to go beyond the village limits.

"Last night little Gracie started just about dusk to return home from the house of a little friend with whom she had spent the afternoon. Her nearest way home was through a cross street at the outskirts of the village, the road being at the edge of a low bit of ground thickly covered with brush.

"While passing along, she was suddenly pounced upon by the Mountain Maniac, who had lain concealed in the brush, and dragged into the swamp out of sight of any passer by.

"Silencing her by fearful threats, he shouldered my child and started for the mountain.

"They passed near the house where Grace had spent the afternoon, and she shrieked out the name of her little play-mate.

"Her voice was recognized, and filled with dread they hurried here and told me."

Dubarry paused and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"In less than thirty seconds from the time when the first word fell on my ear, I was dashing along that road yonder in pursuit of the demon.

"Once, when near the foot of the mountain, I heard Gracie scream, and oh! kind Father in Heaven, grant that I may never experience such a sensation as then swept over me.

"It was awful!

"Frenziedly I dashed onward, and I now knew that it was too recklessly to have met with success had not God in mercy guided my footsteps.

"I was rambling hither and thither, now pausing, now dashing frantically here and there, when daylight broke, and then—

"Oh! horrible—most horrible—I discovered—blood!

"I nearly fainted beneath the shock. Blood! My little Gracie's blood.

"I thought of her throat being cut—it would have left just such a trail as I saw—spot following spot, as if it had dropped from some ghastly wound.

"But I nerved myself to go onward. The trail might lead me to him, and I would avenge my little Gracie's untimely death. -I might even rescue her body un mutilated and give it other burial than the stomach of that cannibal fiend.

"The trail was plain enough; it could not be lost. It led me higher and higher up the mountain until it suddenly ended—on a narrow ledge—an abyss before me, a wall of rock behind me.

"And then— " He was now as pale as death—"I heard a low, morn—a smothered cry of childish fear. It was Gracie's voice, not far distant, seemingly behind some boulders near at hand.

"I dashed towards them, saw an opening, and knew that I was before a cave, the lair of the mountain monster.

"I dashed in, snatching out my revolver as I went, and saw—the maniac was about to cut the child's throat.

"He heard me—glanced up—uttered a wild yell—and quicker than a tiger springs was upon me, and beneath the fierce assault I was forced to retreat.

"My revolver would not shoot, something was wrong with it, and I could only use it as a club against his murderous knife.

"Furiously he forced the fight, and with a spring had me by the throat even as I emerged on the ledge; the knife was raised to pierce my heart, and I saved my life only by a swift blow with the revolver; I knocked the knife from his hand, but lost my weapon at the same time, and then it became a hand-to-hand struggle.

"My God! what a terrific struggle that was; to my dying day its memory will haunt me.

"Writhing, twisting, squirming, biting, scratching, clawing—this is a specimen of the latter," pointing to the badly scraped cheek I have mentioned, "it was terrible—terrible.

"At last I got the best of him, and forced him backward to the ledge; he knew it, and grasping my shirt with one hand and my beard with the other; he showed a determination to drag me over with him.

"Back—back—until one leg hung over the chasm—back—back—a very slight move would hurl him into eternity—and me, too.

"I must free myself first.

"Raising my knee suddenly, I forcibly planted it in his stomach; the pain caused him to relax his grasp a little, I broke loose, and then—he struck the rocks a hundred feet below.

"I rushed in, and brought my child home in my arms; then I conducted others back to the spot, and they brought the body into town, arriving here but a few minutes before you saw us.

"And that is the story you wanted to hear; so now—it's bedtime—good-night."

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.... " " Ten-Cent Hand Books, Nos.....

Name.....Street and No.....Town.....State.....